

## NOTES

## Notes to the Sonnets

### 1. "TO THE AUTUMNAL MOON"

One of Coleridge's earliest known poems, written at the age of sixteen; first published in *Poems* 1796. He later recalled how he spent many homesick hours star-gazing from the "leads", or flat roof, of Christ's Hospital in London, and how the moon appeared as a messenger from his lost country home at Ottery St Mary, far in the west. The mid-eighteenth-century sub-Miltonic style of invocations, personifications, exclamations, and double-epithets ("wildly-working", "sorrow-clouded") show Coleridge's adolescent influences, together with a touch of the fashionably Gothic ("dragon-wing'd Despair"). The symbol of the Moon, and the figures of Hope and Despair, appear frequently in the mature poetry.

### 2. "LIFE"

"Sonnet written just after the author left the Country in September 1789" (Coleridge's ms. note); not published until *Poetical Works* 1834. Coleridge spent the school summer holiday of 1789 at Ottery St Mary and Exeter, visiting his beloved elder sister Anne (3) who was gravely ill. Coleridge's delight in the magic landscape of the river valley, where he had grown up until the age of nine, suggests his future interest in symbolic topographies.

### 3. "ON RECEIVING AN ACCOUNT THAT HIS ONLY DEATH WAS INEVITABLE"

Written at Christ's Hospital School in early 1791; not published until *Poetical Works* 1834. Coleridge's sense that he was an "orphan" cast out from his home (see No. 25) was increased by the many early deaths in his family (II). His father, the Reverend John Coleridge, had died in 1782; his elder brother Luke in 1790; and finally his sister Anne (4) in March 1791. Two other brothers, Frank and James, later died in India. Coleridge mentions Anne's death again in the first Conversation Poem (No. 22).

### 4. "ON QUITTING SCHOOL FOR COLLEGE"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. Coleridge left Christ's Hospital in summer 1791, as a "Grecian" or Classics scholar with an Exhibition to

Jesus College, Cambridge. Charles Lamb later recalled in his *Essays of Elia* how Coleridge had held his fellow schoolboys spellbound with his brilliant talk in the school cloisters (5); but there is evidence from Coleridge's letters that he was deeply unhappy during much of his schooldays. The tone of pathos and nostalgia shows the new influence of William Bowles (1762-1850), and partly imitates the latter's poem "On Quitting Winchester College".

5. "TO THE RIVER OTTER"

First published as part of a longer poem, "The Recollection", in Coleridge's journal *The Watchman*, 1796; and then as a sonnet in *Poems* 1797. Possibly composed as early as 1793, during Coleridge's summer vacation at Ottery, when he was depressed by debts and failure to win an academic prize at Cambridge, and influenced by Bowles's "Sonnet to the River Itchin". One of Coleridge's finest early poems, it suggests many characteristic themes: the symbolism of a magic river, the romantic innocence of childhood, the "bright transparency" of memory (II) and the longing for home. The movement of the poet's mind as he recollects and re-creates (a subject of great psychological interest to Coleridge) is subtly compared to the leaps of a stone skimmed across water, as in the schoolboys' game of "ducks and drakes" (4-5).

TO THE  
RIVER ITCHIN, NEAR WINTON.

by William Bowles

Itchin, when I behold thy banks again,  
Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,  
On which the self-same tints still seem'd to rest,  
Why feels my heart the shiv'ring sense of pain?  
Is it - that many a summer's day has past  
Since, in life's morn, I caroll'd on thy side?  
Is it - that oft, since then, my heart has sigh'd,  
As Youth, and Hope's delusive gleams, flew fast?  
Is it - that those, who circled on thy shore,  
Companions of my youth, now meet no more?  
Whate'er the cause, upon thy banks I bend,  
Sorrowing, yet feel such solace at my heart,  
As at the meeting of some long-lost friend,  
From whom, in happier hours, we wept to part.

6. "TO THE AUTHOR OF *THE ROBBERS*"

Composed at Jesus College, Cambridge in November 1794; first published *Poems* 1797. Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), dramatist and lyric poet in the "sturm und drang" (storm and stress) style, was Professor of History at the University of Jena, and friend of Goethe with whom he collaborated on a collection of ballads (like Coleridge and Wordsworth). This sonnet marks Coleridge's rapturous discovery of German Gothic literature. He wrote in a letter: "Tis past one o'clock in the morning – I sate down at twelve o'clock to read the "Robbers" of Schiller – I had read chill and trembling until I came to the part where the Moor fires a pistol over the Robbers who are asleep – I could read no more – My God! Southey! Who is this Schiller? This Convulser of the Heart? Did he write his Tragedy amid the yelling of Fiends? . . . Why have we ever called Milton sublime?" (3 November 1794).

7. "TO THE REV. W.L. BOWLES"

First published as part of a series of twelve "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" in the *Morning Chronicle*, December 1794; and then in an adapted version in *Poems* 1796. Bowles's own collection of *Sonnets written chiefly on Picturesque Spots, during a Tour* (1789), the "kindred Lays" (8), had a powerful effect on Coleridge, who made no less than forty copies by hand to give to friends. They made his own poetic style more personal and emotional. Lamb called Bowles "the Genius of the Sacred Fountain of Tears". The other "Eminent Characters", who made up Coleridge's intellectual pantheon at this period, included Edmund Burke, Joseph Priestley, William Godwin, his friend Robert Southey, and the actress Sarah Siddons. These sonnets mark Coleridge's first appearance in print, after he had abandoned Cambridge and moved to London in preparation for Pantisocracy.

8. "PANTISOCRACY"

First sent by Coleridge in a letter to Southey of September 1794; then published as Southey's in 1849; finally restored to Coleridge in *Poetical Works* 1893. Coleridge adds that the second and third lines were contributed by Robert Favell. The confusion over authorship is typical of the first excitement of the Pantisocratic scheme, when private property was to be abolished, and even the ownership of a poem was communal. Twelve couples were due to sail to America in March 1795, to start an ideal farming community (4–6) on the banks of the Susquehannah river, in upstate Pennsylvania. Here "all would govern equally", and there would be dancing and sexual magic (7–8). But there is also a surprising early reference to Coleridge's nightmares (II).

9. "PITY"

Written late 1794, and published in *Poems* 1796. A product of Coleridge's most radical Christian phase, emphasizing the Unitarian view of Jesus, the "Galilean" (12), as a social revolutionary. The naïve philanthropy of the poem should not hide its technical skill, with free-running lines, and new conversational ease. It has the first reference to Coleridge's fiancée, Sara Fricker (9), whom he had met with his fellow Pantisocrats in Bristol, and who initially shared his missionary zeal. (See No. 24). Coleridge could not decide the title of the poem – calling it "Mercy", then "Charity" – and finally told his Jacobin friend Thelwall that the whole morality of the sonnet was "detestable" because so patronizing.

10. "ON RECEIVING A LETTER INFORMING ME OF  
THE BIRTH OF A SON"

This and the next two sonnets were composed after the birth of Hartley Coleridge at Bristol, on 19 September 1796. This first sonnet was not published until the 1847 Supplement to the *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge was away in Birmingham, collecting subscribers for his journal the *Watchman*, and wrote the poems as he hurried home. He later sent all three to his friend Tom Poole in a letter of 1 November 1796. "This sonnet puts in no claim to poetry (indeed as a composition I think so little of them that I neglected to repeat [*ie. recite*] them to you) but it is a most faithful picture of my feelings on a very interesting event. When I was with you they were, indeed, excepting the first, in a rude and undrest state." The strong religious tone of the first sonnet becomes more philosophical in the second, and finally intimate and domestic in the third. Thus according to Coleridge's theory on the sonnet form (see Preface), the "lonely feeling" of paternity becomes grounded in the common experience of family love.

11. "COMPOSED ON A JOURNEY HOMEWARD; THE AUTHOR  
HAVING RECEIVED INTELLIGENCE OF THE BIRTH OF A SON"

First published in *Poems* 1797 (see previous note). The sonnet explores two characteristic metaphysical speculations: the Pythagorean idea of pre-existence, as if little Hartley had existed in some spiritual sphere before birth (1-6); and Coleridge's fear that in his absence the baby might hasten to return to that "sphere", as if he had already served his "sentence" on a wicked earth (10-12). Explaining the former to Poole, Coleridge wrote of line 6: "Almost all the followers of Fenelon believe that men are degraded Intelligences who had all once existed together in a paradisiacal or perhaps heavenly state. The first four lines express a feeling which I have often had – the present has appeared like a vivid dream or exact similitude of some past circumstance." Twenty years later in Chapter 22 of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge re-examined this idea, in his analysis of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality in Early Childhood".

12. "TO A FRIEND WHO ASKED, HOW I FELT WHEN THE NURSE  
FIRST PRESENTED MY INFANT TO ME

First published *Poems* 1797 (see previous two notes). The "friend" may have been Charles Lloyd, who was staying with Coleridge, or Charles Lamb in London. The last and finest of Coleridge's sonnets about the experience of fatherhood, now expanding to a new conception of married love. Sara's maternal presence is richly acknowledged (II-14), and points to her important role in the Conversation poems. Lamb wrote to Coleridge: "I love you for those simple, tender, heart-flowing lines with which you conclude your last, and in my eyes, best 'sonnet' (as you call 'em) . . . Cultivate simplicity, Coleridge; or rather, I should say, banish elaborateness." But the erotic image of the child at the breast (6) had complex overtones for Coleridge (see the *Asra* poems).

13. "ON A RUINED HOUSE IN A ROMANTIC COUNTRY"

Third in a series of three comic sonnets, first published in the *Monthly Magazine*, November 1797; then in *Biographia Literaria*, 1817. Coleridge's aim was to parody the worst excesses of the early "Romantic" style (already a significant term) as used by Lamb, Lloyd, himself and others. He wrote afterwards: "Under the name of Nehemiah Higginbottom I contributed three sonnets, the first of which had for its object to excite a good-natured laugh at the spirit of doleful egotism and the recurrence of favourite phrases. . . . The second was on low creeping language and thoughts under the pretence of *simplicity* . . . The third, the phrases of which were borrowed entirely from my own poems, on the indiscriminate use of elaborate and swelling language and imagery. . . ." (Compare No. 22.) The sonnet is a vamped version of the well-known children's nursery rhyme, "The House that Jack Built", adapted to stock "Romantic" figures such as the guilty father, the forlorn maiden, the amorous knight, and the harvest moon (considered *a posteriori*).

14. "TO ASRA"

Original draft prefixed to a MS copy of "Christabel", given to Sara Hutchinson on Coleridge's departure for Malta in 1804; first published in *Poetical Works* 1893. "Asra" was Coleridge's private anagram and romantic name for Sara Hutchinson, with whom he had fallen in love in 1799. (See Preface to the *Asra* Poems.) The image of love as a fountain (5-6) springing up spontaneously in the human heart (and therefore mysterious in its origins) appears frequently in Coleridge's poetry and prose: see for example "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner", part 4 (No. 32); "Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath" (No. 55); and the essay "On the Communication of Truth", (*The Friend*, I, p. 65).

15. "LADY, TO DEATH WE'RE DOOM'D . . ."

Drafts of this sonnet appear in Coleridge's Malta Notebooks (1804-6); first published in *Poetical Works* 1893. Except for one line it is a close translation of the Italian original, "Alla Sua Amico", by Giambattista Marino, in which Coleridge saw parallels with his own unrequited love. Marino (1569-1625) was a Neapolitan-born poet whose rakish life included two spells of imprisonment, an assassination attempt by a rival poet, Murtola, and numerous love-affairs. He revolutionized the courtly Petrarchism of the *cinquecento* (which Coleridge described as "all one cold glitter of heavy conceits") with a flamboyant, bizarre style of lurid emotions, much in evidence here. To this torrid, southern Mediterranean love poem of fire and hell, Coleridge added the striking image of the "Adder's eye" (5). The idea of the beloved woman as a poisonous serpent, evidently relates to Geraldine's sexual transformation into a snake-like or "lamia" creature in "Christabel" (No. 33).

16. "FAREWELL TO LOVE"

Written in the margin of Lamb's copy of *The Elegant Works of Fulke Greville* (1633), on Coleridge's return from Italy in 1806; published in *the Courier*, 27 September 1806; and collected in *Literary Remains*, 1836. The poem is a skilful revision of Greville's "Sonnet 74 to Coelica", which opens "Farewell, sweet Boy, complain not of my truth. . . ." Coleridge uses Greville's rhyme-scheme, but subtly adapts each line to apply to his own impossible love for Asra. He pictures himself, in the Jacobean courtly manner, as wholly dedicated to Love's service (5-8), and retains the traditional trope of Cupid as the blind god (12). The quality of Coleridge's revision of Greville's stumbling and mechanical sonnet can be suggested by his re-handling of line 12 alone. Greville had written: "The spectacles to my life was thy blindness". Coleridge revised this to: "Your dreams alone I dreamt, and caught your blindness". Coleridge renews the formal conventions of Greville's work with the intensity of personal experience, emphasized by the stressed pronouns, the whispered alliteration (eg. 4, 8) and the sense of poignant confidentiality.

17. "FANCY IN NUBIBUS: OR THE POET IN THE CLOUDS"

First published in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 7 February 1818; then collected in *Poetical Works* 1828. An early ms. has the note, "A Sonnet composed by the Seaside, October 1817" - probably at Little Hampton in Sussex. Coleridge had now settled in Highgate (1816) after his years of wandering, and spent regular autumn holidays at the newly-fashionable seaside resorts, especially after 1820 at Ramsgate in Kent (see No. 69). Here he walked, bathed, met literary friends and meditated on clouds and seascapes. The easy, playful, holiday manner perhaps disguises the skill of the single, perambulating sentence with its references to Shakespeare (*Hamlet*,

4-6) and Homer (II-14), and its painterly sense of limitless horizons.

There is an intriguing echo (6-II) of Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (published in the *Examiner*, 1 December 1816). While Stolberg's lyric "An das Meer" ("At the Sea") probably suggested the final image of the "blind bard" seeing his epic poems rise out of the sea. The marine view from the promenade is made in the evening, not the daylight (2), so perhaps this is an after-dinner sonnet, more genial and expansive than entirely original.

#### 18. "TO NATURE"

First published by Thomas Allsop in *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*, 1836; collected in *Poems* 1863. Allsop, who was Coleridge's young protégé and sometime amanuensis in the Highgate years, found the sonnet "on a detached sheet of paper, without note or observation", and had "some faint impression" that he took it down from Coleridge's dictation in about 1820. The poem is a defiant late reflection of Coleridge's early Pantheism, now seen in conventional and even sentimental terms. The circumstance that Coleridge was addressing such a sympathetic and admiring friend as Allsop (to whom he wrote many confessional letters), perhaps accounts for the tone of "earnest piety" (5) and pathos. The touching idea of the fifty-year-old Coleridge building his "altar in the fields", and living outdoors under the "fretted dome" of the sky (9-10), can be taken as a genial "phantasy" of the old Pantheist of Stowey days (see No. 8). In fact this was a period in which Coleridge was much worried by unorthodox religious doubts, and was publicly persecuted for his "mysticism" by sceptical critics like Hazlitt (see *Confessional Poems*). Perhaps the poem is more defensive and anxious than it sounds.

#### 19. "WORK WITHOUT HOPE"

Originally composed as part of a much longer poem in a Notebook entry dated 21 February, 1825 (see No. 91); published in the *Bijou* magazine, 1828; collected in *Poetical Works* 1828. One of Coleridge's best known later poems: the sense of personal despair is subtly offset by the images of natural energy and busy springtime re-birth. The "emblematic" suggestion of these images - the bees, the fount, the sieve - were compared by Coleridge to the religious poems of George Herbert. The self-disgust implicit in "slugs" (1) so shocked the editor of the *Bijou*, that he printed it as "stags". "Amaranths" (9) are the eternal flowers of the classical Elysian Fields, symbols of artistic achievement. The "spells that drowse my soul" (12) is a possible reference to Coleridge's opium addiction. The sonnet may have been inspired by a hostile article by William Hazlitt of 1825, reprinted as "Mr Coleridge" in *The Spirit of the Age*, which cruelly referred to Coleridge's failure to gather "fruits and flowers, immortal fruits and amaranthine



flowers" in a wasted artistic career. The violent contrast to the tone of the previous sonnet (No. 18) gives some indication of Coleridge's intense swings of mood in later life, when periods of tranquillity were interrupted by renewed guilt over his addiction, anxiety about his son Hartley, and the nagging failure to complete his great philosophical work, the *Opus Maximum* (see Chronology).

#### 20. "DUTY SURVIVING SELF-LOVE"

Composed at Highgate, September 1826; first published in *Poetical Works* 1828. One of Coleridge's most powerful late poems, calm but grimly self-justifying in tone. He subtitled it: "The only sure Friend of Declining Life. A Soliloquy." The image of friendship as failing light is steadily developed: from the early "wanings" of affection (3), through the distinction between the type of friends who radiate or absorb light (9-10), to the final quenching of friends like oil-lamps burning dim in "noisome" or polluted air (12). Coleridge's sense of isolation is made harsher by his own conviction that he is "unchanged within" (1), and that he stands unshaken by "feeble yearnings" for love (7). Many of Coleridge's old friends had indeed fallen away by this date - Southey, Hazlitt, Wordsworth - though they would have given very different accounts of the reasons for this. In fact Coleridge craved friendship more than ever, and found it at Highgate with the Gillmans, J. H. Green, Thomas Allsop, Charles Tulk MP, and his nephew H. N. Coleridge (see Chronology). In a ms. version Coleridge says the poem arose from a question that Ann Gillman ("Alia") once put to him: whether his Philosophy had made him "happier" in life? Coleridge replied: "calmer at least and the less unhappy". He then described how the sonnet followed when "Alia" left the room. "The grey-haired philosopher, left to his own musings, continued playing with the thoughts that Alia's question had excited, till he murmured them to himself in half audible words, which at first casually, and then for the amusement of his ear, he punctuated with rhymes, without conceiting that he had by these means changed them into poetry."

#### 21. "TO THE YOUNG ARTIST"

Composed in November 1833, some eight months before Coleridge died at Highgate, and one of his last known poems; first published in *Poetical Works* 1834. The handsome young German portrait painter, Johann Kayser, had charmed the old, sick poet during a visit to Highgate. Coleridge's florid complimentary verses become, unexpectedly, a touching farewell and handing on of the creative torch from one generation to the next. Kayser's pencil drawing of Coleridge has survived, showing a stout, shrunken invalid, who appears breathless and in pain. Coleridge remarked that "the unhappy Density of the Nose and idiotic Drooping of the Lip" was no great flattery. But

he was always appalled by his portraits in old age: "a glow-worm with a pin thro it, as seen in broad daylight." The reference to the "blank scroll" turning to a "magic glass" (5) makes one wonder if Kayser had tried to take a daguerreotype photograph of Coleridge; if so, alas, none is known.

## Notes to the Conversation Poems

### 22. "TO A FRIEND" [CHARLES LAMB]

Given to Lamb in London in December 1794, with an unfinished draft of "Religious Musings" (see No. 95); first published in *Poems* 1796. The "dear-lov'd Sister" (8) was Mary Lamb, who suffered periods of insanity; while Coleridge's own sister Anne (12) had died in 1792 (see No. 3). The "lambent glories" (24) is a pun on his friend's name. This first Conversation Poem begins with rejection of the epic mode, "the rhyme/Elaborate and swelling", for a more familiar poetic style of sentimental reminiscence and religious consolation, very close to an actual letter which Coleridge wrote in September 1794: "I had a Sister - an only Sister. Most tenderly did I love her. . . ." (Compare 12-13.) The idea of love and friendship cherished (20) among an intimate group, the "tenderest tones medicinal of love" (11), is a central theme.

### 23. "THE EOLIAN HARP" [TO SARA COLERIDGE]

First published in *Poems* 1796 as "Effusion XXV", where it is dated 20 August 1795; the beautiful "one Life" passage (26-33) was added in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Coleridge rented the cottage (3) at Clevedon, overlooking the Bristol Channel (11), in the summer before his marriage to Sara Fricker on 4 October 1795. This is partly a poem of courtship, in which tender sexual feelings are set within a pastoral landscape of hill and coast. The Eolian harp (12) was a rectangular novelty instrument, much in vogue at the end of the eighteenth century, consisting of eight gut strings stretched over a decorated wooden soundbox, which was usually placed on an outside windowsill or table. The wind passing freely over the strings produced a haunting, longdrawn chord, rising and falling, in a manner suggestive of physical longing or excitement. Coleridge uses it first as an image of his love-making with Sara (14-17); then as an extended simile for the poet's transforming imagination playing on a visionary landscape (17-33); and finally as a metaphor for his philosophic speculations about "animated nature" being played on by an "intellectual breeze", which is God (44-48). Sara reproves him for taking liberties both physical and metaphysical (49-64), but the "one Life" passage of 1817 seems to confirm the notion of a harmonious world tuned like a harp to "joyance everywhere" (29).

24. "REFLECTIONS ON HAVING LEFT A PLACE OF RETIREMENT"

First published in the *Monthly Magazine*, October 1796, with the title "Reflections on entering into active life. A Poem which affects not to be poetry"; then in *Poems* 1797. The motto from Horace was translated by Lamb as "properer for a Sermon". Coleridge regretfully left the Clevedon cottage (see No. 23) to launch his radical Christian newspaper the *Watchman* in Bristol in December 1795. The poem contrasts his longings for domestic happiness with his sense of public and religious duty (41-62). Despite these rival demands, it is the pastoral landscape of the north Somersetshire hills which most affects Coleridge and dominates the poem (27-42). The familiar style is increasingly adapted to this landscape, with vivid topographical images, and the natural repetitions and exclamations of speech, as in Coleridge's description of the Bristol businessman weekending in the countryside, who so admires his bucolic existence with Sara (9-26). "Howard" (49) was the philanthropist and prison reformer John Howard (1726-90), who died in Russia while tending the sick.

25. "TO THE REV. GEORGE COLERIDGE"

First published as the Dedication to *Poems* 1797, where it is dated "Nether Stowey, Somerset, May 26, 1797". George was Coleridge's elder brother, who had encouraged him with his early poetry, and helped him through many adolescent crises (39-68). The epigraph from Horace reads: "remarkable for his fatherly spirit towards his brothers".

Coleridge moved to Stowey at the end of 1796 (33-5), where he began a series of autobiographical letters to his "one Friend" Tom Poole (32), reflecting on his unhappy childhood and restless upbringing. This theme now enters the Conversation Poems (15-39). Though "too soon transplanted" (18) from his birthplace at Ottery St Mary on the death of his father, Coleridge was watched over by George, who encouraged his writing at Christ's Hospital, paid off his debts at Cambridge, and even bailed him out of the Army: acts of paternal care and kindness that form the background to this poem. However, George did not approve of Coleridge's radical journalism or impetuous marriage to Sara, and hence the requests for forgiveness of "discordant" themes in the poetry (69-74). He also did not accept Coleridge's central myth of childhood, that he was "most a stranger" in his own home (41-2); or that he had begun to glimpse a new pastoral paradise at Stowey (52-61). Coleridge wrote in a copy of *Poems* 1797: "If this volume should ever be delivered according to its direction, i.e. to Posterity, let it be known that the Reverend George Coleridge was displeased and thought his character endangered by the Dedication".

The "Manchineel" (26) was a fabled Caribbean tree with luscious fruit and foliage, said to poison with its finely defused sap, or even with its shade.

26. "THIS LIME-TREE BOWER MY PRISON"

Written at Stowey, July 1797; first published in the *Annual Anthology* 1800; and then in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Coleridge gives a revealing account of the poem's inception in a letter to Southey: "The second day after Wordsworth came to me, dear Sara accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which confined me during the whole times of C. Lamb's stay & still prevents me from all *walks* longer than a furlong. — While Wordsworth, his Sister, & C. Lamb were out one evening; sitting in the arbour of T. Poole's garden, which communicates with mine, I wrote these lines, with which I am pleased:

Well — they are gone: and here I must remain,  
Lam'd by the scathe of fire, lonely & faint,  
This lime-tree bower my prison! . . ."

The 1800 text is addressed "To Charles Lamb, of the India House, London." But an earlier ms. version twice substitutes Sara Coleridge's name for Lamb's (68, "My Sara and my Friends"; 75, "For You my Sara and my Friends").

The poem follows the course of their imagined walk over the top of Quantock (7), down to Holford Combe (11–20), and back up to Alfoxden at sunset overlooking the Bristol Channel (20–37), while Coleridge waits in his bower for their return (45–67). It ends on a sacred note of evensong and homecoming (68–76), which becomes characteristic of the Conversation Poems. "In the great City pent" (30): Lamb worked as a clerk in India House. "On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem/Less gross than bodily" (40–1): Coleridge remarked of these lines, "You remember I am a Berkeleyan", which suggests the reading: "till all seems less a material substance (the earth), than a single living entity (the one Life of nature)." Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753) was the idealist philosopher, after whom Coleridge named his second child. Berkeley argued that existence depended on perception, and that God "spoke" to man through the ordered and unified "language" of the natural world (see Nos. 27 and 96).

27. "FROST AT MIDNIGHT"

Set in the parlour of Coleridge's Stowey cottage, in the freezing February of 1798. First published in a quarto pamphlet (J. Johnson, St Paul's Churchyard, 1798); and then in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817, after many changes. Perhaps the most perfect of Coleridge's Conversation Poems, addressed to his sixteen-month-old baby son Hartley. The poem spools back through memories of Coleridge's own childhood at Ottery St Mary and Christ's Hospital (23–43) and then moves forward to a vision of Hartley's idealized upbringing in the country (44–64), ending with a beautiful passage of pastoral "blessing" (65–74). Coleridge originally added a further verse paragraph, which also included Sara (ms. 74–80):

... Quietly shining to the quiet Moon,  
 Like those, my babe! which ere tomorrow's warmth  
 Have capp'd their sharp keen points with pendulous drops,  
 Will catch thine eye, and with their novelty  
 Suspend thy little soul; then make thee shout,  
 And stretch and flutter from thy mother's arms  
 As thou would fly for very eagerness.

But later Coleridge removed this because it destroyed "the rondo, and return upon itself of the Poem", with the shaping idea of the "secret ministry" (1 and 72), the mysterious priest-like powers of Nature. "Only that film . . ." (15): the transparent heat-tremour above a firegrate, which in Devonshire folklore was known as a "stranger" (26, 41) and promised "the arrival of some absent friend" at the door. But also an image of Coleridge's "fluttering" imagination playing above his sleeping child, and contrasting with the various images of sacred "quietness" throughout the poem.

#### 28. "FEARS IN SOLITUDE"

Dated by Coleridge "Nether Stowey, April 20, 1798", at the height of a French invasion scare, after landings in Ireland. Published in the quarto pamphlet (J. Johnson, 1798) together with No. 27 and No. 98 ("France: An Ode"). Republished with No. 98 in the *Morning Post*, 14 October 1802; and in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Though structured as an interior monologue during the course of a daylong walk, the poem arose from Coleridge's political conversations with friends at Stowey about the war with France, and their avid reading of the newspaper reports together. It is an important statement of Coleridge's political reflections on such contemporary issues as British colonialism (41 ff), parliamentary corruption (53 ff), discredited State religion (63 ff), and popular warmongering (88 ff). Coleridge calls for a sober resolution against any invader (129 ff), and an end to factional strife between the "radical" and "patriot" parties (154 ff). Coleridge wrote on one ms.: "NB. 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." However, the poem rises to a passionate expression of Coleridge's own love for Britain (174 ff), and concludes with one of his finest evocations of home-coming (203 ff), a slumbering twilight vision of Stowey (the church, Poole's house, the elms, his own cottage with Sara and little Hartley) seen from the "green sheep-track" winding down from the Quantock hills, where Coleridge has spent the day in solitary meditation. This final note of sacred pastoral has been compared to paintings by Samuel Palmer.

29. "THE NIGHTINGALE"

First published in the *Lyrical Ballads* 1798, with the subtitle "A Conversational Poem" (Coleridge's first use of the term); and then in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817, as "A Conversation Poem. Written in April 1798." Coleridge celebrates and explores the meaning of the nightingale's song, often heard in the holly groves between Stowey and Alfoxden in the spring of 1798. Far from being the solitary and "most melancholy bird" of Milton's poem "Il Penseroso" (13), the nightingale represents an active principle of joy in the natural universe (40-49) and crowded together they "answer and provoke" (58) each other like a harmonious circle of friends. The poem is addressed to William and Dorothy Wordsworth (40), and also perhaps to young William Hazlitt who took part in these expeditions, as he later recalled in *My First Acquaintance with Poets* (1821): "Returning that same evening, I got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth, while Coleridge was explaining the different notes of the nightingale to his sister. . . ." The "gentle Maid" (69) living near the castle is perhaps a premonition of Christabel, another night-walker in the woods. The climactic incident under the moonlight (90 ff), one of Nature's mysterious "ministrations" (see No. 27) was originally recorded in prose in one of Coleridge's notebooks: "Hartley fell down and 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!" (CNB I, 219). Coleridge sent the original ms. draft of the poem up to Wordsworth at Alfoxden, with a humorous doggerel note, beginning:

In stale blank verse a subject stale  
I send *per post* my *Nightingale*;  
And like an honest bard, dear Wordsworth,  
You'll tell me what you think my Bird's worth. . . .

30. "TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH"

First published *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. A ms. version dated January 1807 was published in Campbell's edition of the *Poetical Works* 1893. Coleridge's ms. title reads: "To W. Wordsworth. Lines Composed, for the greater part on the Night, on which he finished the recitation of his Poem (in thirteen Books) concerning the growth and history of his own Mind, Jan. 7, 1807, Coleorton, near Ashby de la Zouche." Wordsworth read the unpublished *Prelude* over several nights to Coleridge on his return from Malta, and this last Conversation Poem is Coleridge's response, first giving an account of its themes: Wordsworth's childhood in the Lakes (11-26); his experiences in revolutionary France (27-38); his return to England and self-dedication to poetry (39-47). Coleridge's overwhelming sense of Wordsworth's

genius, and his own comparative failure to fulfil the creative promise of the Quantock days follows (47-75). Coleridge compares his own states of feeling successively to the condition of a drowning man, a crying baby, a corpse in a coffin, and "the constellated foam" of the sea. The poem ends with a final healing version of the homecoming motif. (107, MS. version: "All whom I deepliest love - in one room all!". This refers to the other listeners, including Dorothy, Asra, and Mary Wordsworth.) Wordsworth did not wish Coleridge to publish this poem, because of the intensity of emotion it revealed between the two friends, who later quarrelled in 1810. This led Coleridge to suppress a remarkable passage from the MS. version, which expressed his feelings for Wordsworth:

Dear shall it be to every human heart  
To me how more than dearest! me, on whom  
Comfort from thee, and utterance of thy love,  
Came with such heights and depths of harmony,  
Such sense of wings uplifting, that the storm  
Scatter'd and whirl'd me, till my thoughts became  
A bodily tumult; and thy faithful hopes,  
Thy hopes of me, dear Friend! by me unfelt!  
Were troublous to me, almost as a voice,  
Familiar once, and more than musical;  
To one cast forth, whose hope had seem'd to die  
A wanderer with a worn-out heart  
Mid strangers pining with untended wounds.  
O Friend, too well thou know'st, of what sad years  
The long suppression had benumb'd my soul,  
That even as life returns upon the drown'd,  
The unusual joy awoke a throng of pains -  
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe . . .

In the published version this was starkly replaced by 61-5.

## Notes to the Ballads

### 31. "THE THREE GRAVES"

First published in this fragmentary form in *The Friend*, September 1809; and then in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. This was Coleridge's first unfinished experiment with the ballad form, composed at Stowey in summer 1797. It was a continuation of a poem begun by Wordsworth at Racedown (MS. Parts I and II, not printed here), the story of which Coleridge summarizes in his prose Preface.

Based on a folktale of rural witchcraft, it is set in an English country village recognizable as belonging to the Quantock region in the early eighteenth century. Coleridge uses the narrative voice of an "old country Sexton", deliberately naïve, to tell the tale of a mother's supernatural curse against her daughter. The style and theme (the curse) bear an evident relation to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (No. 32), begun some months later; while the vivid woodland settings amidst the changing seasons suggest the haunted world of "Christabel" (No. 33). Coleridge emphasizes his "exclusively psychological" interest in the pathology of fear and superstition, and the way "an idea violently and suddenly impressed" on the imagination, can gradually possess it. "I have endeavoured to trace the progress to madness, step by step." The curse arises out of the mother's extreme sexual jealousy, and moves irresistibly from her daughter Mary, to Mary's friend Ellen, and finally to Mary's young husband Edward. Coleridge relates this pattern to recent anthropological studies of native witchcraft in the West Indies, such as Bryan Edwards's *History of the British Colonies* (1793). He later explained his fascination with such material in chapter 14 of the *Biographia Literaria*, arguing that psychic or supernatural "delusion" could still reveal the "dramatic truth" of extreme human emotions, which are "real in this sense" and therefore of universal interest and valid for poetry, rather than merely picturesque fictions.

### 32. "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

First version composed November 1797–March 1798, published in *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798; alterations made in *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800; further alterations and prose gloss added *Sibylline Leaves* 1817; final text in *Poetical Works* 1834.

Coleridge's most famous poem was begun during a long winter walk over Quantockshead to the harbour of Watchet, and down through Exmoor, with Wordsworth and Dorothy. His sources included the voyages of Captain Shelvocke (who mentions the albatross) and Captain Cook (who describes the southern ocean); the dream of a "spectre ship" told by his Stowey neighbour George Cruikshank; plot suggestions by Wordsworth; and his own experience of nursing a fellow dragoon through the hallucinations of a smallpox fever in 1794 (see Chronology).

The fast, flexible stanza (four to nine lines), the weird sea-shanty music of the rhymes, the haunting imagery of sun, moon and stars, are all notable developments which Coleridge continued to refine over twenty years. The ballad has been variously interpreted as a Christian allegory of fall and redemption; a moral study of the origins of Evil; a symbolic account of the *poète maudit* figure; an autobiographical vision of opium addiction; a "Green parable" of man's destruction of nature and Nature's revenge; and a psychological investigation into post-traumatic stress syndrome with its well-established features of obsessive recall and compulsive guilt. Coleridge insisted in his *Table Talk* that it was a poem of "pure imagination".



### 33. "CHRISTABEL"

First published in *Christabel; Kubla Khan, A Vision; The Pains of Sleep* (John Murray, 1816); then collected in *Poetical Works* 1828. Originally intended for the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* 1800, but rejected by Wordsworth as unfinished and discordant with the rest of the collection. Coleridge once described it as "a Legend in five Acts", and told the whole plot to James Gillman as late as 1820, but was never able to complete it. The "celebrated poets" who had previously heard recitations of "Christabel", and imitated its archaic phrasing, were Byron and Walter Scott.

The story draws on various folktales of demon lovers, vampires and lamias (women who are really serpents, see 583-96) such as C. M. Wieland's *Oberon* (1780). Geraldine's seduction of the teenage Christabel in the mysterious, twinkling night-scene of Part I; and her enthrallment of Christabel's father, Sir Leoline, in the lavish, "daylight witchery", court-scene of Part II, suggest she is some kind of preternatural spirit, lawless rather than evil. She belongs to the wild wood (31-70) outside the symbolic castle of domestic civilization (123-34). Christabel's innocence, and Geraldine's sexual power, are central to the psychological drama of enchantment, initiation and spell-binding which follows (245-78). This is emphasized by the snake and the dove of Bracey's allegoric dream (523-82). Coleridge chose a courtly, medieval period setting, with the kind of antiquarian interest in dress, architecture, and ritual gesture that later fascinated the Pre-Raphaelite painters. This in itself may have made the ballad difficult to continue, because of its complex "machinery" and fragile, trance-like atmosphere. Coleridge later compared Christabel's trial to the spiritual "martyrdom" of the Spanish mystic St Teresa of Avila, as described by the seventeenth-century poet Richard Crashaw, "A Hymn to Saint Teresa" (1652). The Conclusion to Part II is traditionally taken as a portrait of Hartley Coleridge, and highlights the impossibility of guarding innocence.

The genius of the ballad lies in its subtle combination of decorative, occult and erotic elements, which continually hint at some appalling act of daemonic possession without ever being quite explicit. (Hazlitt remarked that there was "something disgusting at the bottom . . . like moon-beams playing on a charnel-house.") As with "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Coleridge later began to write an explanatory prose gloss, but decided not to use it. The most revealing paragraph (alongside 451-56) reads in the MS.: "Christabel then recollects the whole, and knows that it was not a Dream; but yet cannot disclose the fact, that the strange Lady is a supernatural Being with the stamp of the Evil Ones on her." (Princeton MS.)

### 34. "THE BALLAD OF THE DARK LADIÉ"

First published in this fragmentary form, *Poetical Works* 1834. Very little is known of this ballad, except that it was begun at Stowey in spring 1798,

for the *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge's undated ms. list of his unpublished poems before 1817 includes "The Black Ladié, 190 lines" – so much has been lost. The woodland setting, the medieval figures, and the suggestion that the Dark Ladie has been seduced (29–32), and will soon be betrayed, by her knight (41–8), obviously links it to the world of "Christabel". The wedding feast with its "nodding minstrels" (53) also recalls the opening of "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner". Describing his collaboration with Wordsworth, in Chapter 14 of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge later wrote: "It was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. . . . With this in view I wrote the 'Ancient Mariner', and was preparing, among other poems, the 'Dark Ladié', and the 'Christabel', in which I should have more nearly realised my ideal than I had done in my first attempt."

### 35. "LOVE"

First version published in *The Morning Post*, 21 December 1799; revised for *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Composed after Coleridge's return from Germany, when he went to visit Wordsworth at Sockburn, Lancashire, in November 1799. Here Coleridge first met Mary and Sara Hutchinson, at their brother's farm on the banks of the river Tees. (See *Asra Poems*.) The ballad is set in the Sockburn landscape, and the early version makes mention of a local "greystone" in the fields, and the Conyers family tomb in Sockburn church (13–16).

Its simplicity is deceptive. The poem is constructed as one ballad containing another, with two time-scales, and two sets of medieval lovers; the fate of the first pair decides the fate of the second. The speaker is a lovelorn minstrel (his harp with "a Cypress and a Myrtle" bound, also appears in the early version) who is courting the lovely Lady Genevieve. (These are the first, or foreground, pair of lovers.) The minstrel tells the story of the Knight of the Burning Brand and his beloved, the Lady of the Land (29–36). (These are the second, or mythical, pair of lovers.) The Knight has been "crazed" by the vision of an "angel beautiful and bright" (49–52): a *femme fatale* who is really a "Fiend". She eventually drives the Knight to his death, despite all the ministrations of his own devoted Lady, who nurses him in a cave amidst the "yellow forest-leaves". The Lady Genevieve is so moved by this tale, that she apparently surrenders to the minstrel's wooing (65ff). But in the tell-tale phrase of the last line, Coleridge leaves open the possibility that Genevieve is herself a reincarnation of the "Fiend", and the fatality will be repeated. Keats brilliantly developed the autumnal atmosphere of the Knight's story in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1820).

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. Composed at Highgate as late as 1827-8, it represents a remarkable return to Coleridge's ballad experiments of the early years. The reference to "Dan Ovid's mazy tales of love" (37) connects it to "The Garden of Boccaccio" (No. 70), and the inspiration of Ann Gillman at this time. (See Notes to No. 70 and No. 91.)

The beautiful young Alice Du Clos is betrothed to the handsome, but hot-headed Lord Julian. One spring morning Julian sends her a message inviting her to join him on a hunting expedition in the green wood. This message is carried by the lecherous vassal knight, Sir Hugh, and his provocative speech to Alice opens the poem (1-24). Alice blithely rejects his treacherous advances, and unhurriedly rides with her young page Florian to join Lord Julian in the wood. But Sir Hugh gets there first, and with iago-like insinuations, convinces Lord Julian that Alice has been unfaithful with Florian (126-69). When Alice rides up through the trees, Julian instantly kills her with a hunting spear.

The heraldic settings, the stylized violence, and the worldly mixture of chivalry and jealousy, are reminiscent of Coleridge's favourite Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser. But the ballad remains remarkably innovative for its skilful psychological shifts in points of view - between Hugh, Alice, Florian and Julian; for the way spoken language, "the forked tongue", is constantly used to dissemble or falsify real feelings; and for the extreme, dream-like speed of the action. Almost entirely ignored by modern criticism, there is no more striking proof of Coleridge's continuing interest in methods of poetic narrative. Though obviously lacking the symbolic power of previous work, the poem combines the formal intricacy of a medieval tapestry, with the lethal rapidity of a modern film sequence. Though presented as a "moral" tale, there is something terrifying in the inconsequentiality of Alice's death, which shows Coleridge's undiminished grasp of the irrational universe.

### Notes to the Hill Walking Poems

37. "LINES COMPOSED WHILE CLIMBING THE LEFT ASCENT OF  
BROCKLEY COOMB, SOMERSETSHIRE, MAY 1795"

First published in *Poems* 1796. Composed during Coleridge's early Bristol period, while lecturing and walking with Southey. Coleridge made several springtime expeditions to the hill country south of the city: along the Mendips, the Quantocks, the edge of Exmoor, or simply out to the coastal hills bordering the Bristol Channel. Brockley Coomb, now a local beauty spot, lies here just inland from Clevedon at Wrington Hill (sometimes known as Goblin Coomb) with a fine view of the "prospect-bounding

Sea" (14). The generalized eighteenth-century topographical style of James Thomson ("sweet songsters" with their "wild-wood melody") is giving way to accurate observations of startled sheep, muscular yew trees, and vivid may-thorn blossom, which are valued for themselves. The pattern of the steep, laboured climb, followed by the sudden expansion of physical vision and moral feeling at the summit, provides the basic structure for many of the Hill Walking Poems. The sheer effort and exhilaration of climbing, the "outdoor" spirit with its touch of professionalism ("the Left Ascent"), is new to the genre. Coleridge also adds the sudden, direct emotional revelation of the last lines: he is missing Sara Fricker, to whom he is engaged.

38. "TO A YOUNG FRIEND ON HIS PROPOSING TO DOMESTICATE  
WITH THE AUTHOR"

First published in *Poems* 1797. The friend was the twenty-one-year-old poet Charles Lloyd, talented but unstable heir to the rich Birmingham banking family, who came to stay with Coleridge and Sara at the Clevedon cottage in autumn 1796, when this poem was composed. Lloyd (who suffered from epilepsy) was to be Coleridge's paying guest and pupil, while Coleridge was to be his mentor, tutor, and one-man university. Coleridge's pastoral care was to include the type of vigorous, open-air excursion to which he invites Lloyd here (16-19), improving him with physical exertion, close observation of the natural world, and intimate talk on uplifting subjects. The daylong climb would end back at the cottage, in "Domestic Bliss", with Sara (45-8). The expedition, whose upward stages are marked by various trees - the mountain ash, the yew, the pine - is also a Baconian allegory of climbing the "Hill of Knowledge" (50) together in "loveliest sympathy" (20). Up-lifted from the mundane care of the world, Nature will pour through their eyes "all its healthful greenness on the soul" (68). The pupilage of Charles Lloyd was not a success, and Coleridge soon came to reject this direct moralizing of Nature. But the Conversation Poems grew from this kind of landscaped narrative.

39. "LINES WRITTEN IN THE ALBUM AT ELBINGERODE,  
IN THE HARTZ FOREST"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 17 September 1799; then collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Home thoughts from abroad. Original draft sent by Coleridge in a letter to Sara dated 17 May 1799, from Gottingen in Germany, where he was studying at the university.

Coleridge made several expeditions through the Hartz mountains in the spring of 1799, particularly to see the legendary "Brocken spectre" (see note to No. 58) and explore the countryside associated with Goethe's *Faust* I. The inns of the Hartz region kept *stammbuchs*, or visitors' albums, for the

poetical comments of Romantic tourists. But Coleridge's poem, with its strong underlying melancholy, becomes a meditation on homesickness and patriotism. First describing his laborious descent down the heavily wooded hillside of the Brocken, it returns in imagination to the summit, from where his thoughts fly westwards towards "dear England" (26). The philosophic reflection on the power of "outward forms" (15-19) was not added until 1817, and closely relates to a passage in "Dejection: An Ode" (No. 50, Stanza IV).

40. "A THOUGHT SUGGESTED BY A VIEW OF SADDLEBACK IN CUMBERLAND"

First published in the *Amulet*, 1833; first collected in *Poems and Dramatic Works* 1877. Composed in autumn 1800, during Coleridge's first year in the Lake District, when he did much solitary fell-climbing. The range of hills containing Skiddaw, Carrock and Saddleback (Blencartha) stretches north and east of Keswick, above Threkeld, and is notable for its bleak beauty and many streams. Coleridge gives a vivid account of being caught in a storm on Carrock in a letter to Humphry Davy of 18 October 1800, shortly after Wordsworth had rejected "Christabel" for the *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge constantly found a mirror for his moods and inner feelings in the Cumberland landscape, and in the poem the "things that seek the earth" include his own tempestuous emotions. His Notebooks of this period are full of similar prose studies of Nature's transcendent "energy", bodied forth in water, wind, or cloud.

41. "INSCRIPTION FOR A FOUNTAIN ON A HEATH"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 24 September 1802; then in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Coleridge uses the classical form of the "lapidary verse" – the stone-carved inscription above a tomb or a drinking fountain – to address the traveller coming down from the hills. The idea of physical refreshment is gradually transformed into that of spiritual replenishment, the combined objects of the traditional pilgrimage (16). The beautiful, solemn movement of the blank verse combines the biblical image of the resting Patriarchs, with the Theocritan blessing of the peaceful bees. Coleridge frequently observed the "tiny cone of sand" (9) dancing in the natural springs of the Lake District fells, a pulsation which he associated with the movement of love in the human heart. (Compare No. 14, and No. 32, lines 282-7.) The repeated reference to children and innocence, associated with water, subtly evokes the idea of Christian baptism into the waters of Eternal Life.

42. "A STRANGER MINSTREL"

First published in a section of memorial verses in the posthumous *Memoirs of Mrs Robinson, Written by Herself*, 1801; finally collected in *Poems and*

*Dramatic Works* 1877. The poem was sent to Mrs Robinson, an enthusiast of the Lake District, during a severe arthritic illness which resulted in her death at the age of forty-two. It is written in a mood of "sad and humorous thought" (9). Lying halfway up the great fell above Keswick, which she had often climbed herself, Coleridge conducts an imaginary conversation about her with the mountain, "old Skiddaw": they sigh amorously, and wish she would return in better health.

Coleridge had first met Mary "Perdita" Robinson (1758-1800) in London: actress, novelist and poet, she had been the mistress of the young George III (a scandal delicately alluded to at 45). She had taken opium, and one of her poems quotes from "Kubla Khan"; Coleridge returns the compliment with quotations from her own poems "The Haunted Beach" (55), and "Jasper" (58). The dialogue between man and mountain is a curious mixture of comedy and elegy, which makes delicate fun of Mrs Robinson's poetic powers of "divinest melody" (51), and yet genuinely celebrates a shared enthusiasm for the fells. Many of the natural observations, such as the "helm of cloud" (12) above Skiddaw will be familiar to modern fell-walkers.

#### 43. "HYMN BEFORE SUN-RISE, IN THE VALE OF CHAMOUNI"

First published, with a long preface describing the Swiss Alps, in the *Morning Post*, on 11 September 1802; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817.

The alpine setting is entirely fictitious. Coleridge had never been to Switzerland, and this "Hymn in the manner of the Psalms" was actually inspired by climbing Scafell in August 1802, during the course of a solitary eight-day climbing tour across the central Lake District fells as far as St Bees. The tour is vividly recorded in a long, serial letter to Sara Hutchinson (Asra), partly written on the summit of Scafell. Coleridge also used his impressions of the waterfalls of Lodore (39-48); while the lovely lines about the "troops of stars" visiting the dark mountain top (30-32) are based on a remark by little Hartley.

Despite all these local sources, Coleridge altered the setting to the grander and more fashionable Alps, as he explained in a letter of 10 September 1802 to William Sotheby: "I thought the Ideas etc. disproportionate to our humble mountains . . ." But he also incorporated, without acknowledgement, into his poem the actual text of a pious German lyric about the Vale of Chamouni by the Swiss poet Frederika Brun. The "Hymn" has thus been dismissed as one of Coleridge's most notorious "plagiarisms". But Brun's original is only twenty lines, while Coleridge's is eighty-five, and his sense of landscape remains recognizably his own. Some of the most striking effects in the poem are spatial and rhythmic: the soaring peaks, the plunging waterfalls, the suspended ice-flows. As Charles Lamb shrewdly pointed out, it is the thunderous and uncharacteristic repetition of God's name (58-69), which most betrays its teutonic source. Contrast with Shelley's godless sublime in "Mont Blanc" (1816).

#### 44. "THE PICTURE, OR THE LOVER'S RESOLUTION"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 6 September 1802; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Coleridge adapted this vivid account of his rambling through the wooded hills round Keswick from a German poem by Saloman Gessner, "Der Feste Vorsatz" ("The Fixed Resolution"). In particular he used Gessner's story of the woodland maiden, Isabel, who has left her artist's sketch — made on a piece of woodbark — outside her cottage for her lover to find (152ff). Isabel is evidently a projection of Asra, and the German original gave Coleridge a literary disguise for his own private feelings. The teutonic influence also shows in the mannered reference to Nymphs, Dryads, and Gnomes (26–45) who do not usually appear in Coleridge's landscapes at this date.

Despite the second-hand quality of much of the verse (which shows Coleridge losing confidence in the original Hill Walking form) there are several passages of moving confessional intensity, about his unhappiness (17–25) and his continuing sense of freedom when alone in the countryside (46–58). He quoted the former, as "lines descriptive of a gloomy solitude" which he had felt in the Lakes, years after in a letter of 27 May 1814 and again on 8 February 1826. The description of the lover's image reflected, and then suddenly dispersed, in the clear waters of the woodland pool (91–104), becomes a metaphor for the imaginative process itself. Coleridge later quoted it, to suggest the mysterious but unstable source of creative power, in the Preface to "Kubla Khan" (No. 74). The poem, which marks the end of the Hill Walking series, is perhaps best considered as a hybrid or transitional form: part open-air verse journal, part literary translation, part confessional meditation, and part philosophic notebook.

### Notes to the Asra Poems

#### 45. "THE KEEPSAKE"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 17 September 1802; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Almost certainly the earliest of the Asra Poems, inspired by the memory of Coleridge's visit to the Hutchinson family farm at Sockburn, Durham, in late autumn 1799 when he first met the animated twenty-four-year-old Sara Hutchinson, and (as he later claimed) fell bewilderingly in love. The fine description of the northern farming landscape after the harvest, frames a decorative but recognizable picture of the "full bosom'd" and "auburn haired" Asra; while the phrase "the entrancement of that maiden kiss" (36) is based on a Notebook entry of November 1799 in which Coleridge reflects on the fatality of their encounter in the firelit parlour at Sockburn. The wild forget-me-not (13, 30), which Coleridge characteristically adopted from the German name *Vergissmeinn*

nicht, in a learned botanical footnote, became one of their lovers' private symbols.

Nevertheless Coleridge disguised the love-poem for publication, by adding the fiction (or wish-fulfilment) of the future springtime marriage (37-9) on his return to the north, which was an impossibility; and by using the courtly name "Emmeline" (14) which Wordsworth also used for his future wife Mary Hutchinson, Asra's elder sister. These disguises and romantic displacements are typical of the Asra Poems, which frequently contain elements of subterfuge and sexual fantasy. Coleridge next met Sara Hutchinson over a year later in the Lake District.

#### 46. "THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 16 October 1802; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Originally with the subtitle, "Lines spoken extempore, to a little child, in early spring". Later retitled, "Answer to a Child's Question". The little child was Hartley aged seven; but the "Love" was Asra. Birds in traditional folklore declare their secret love on St Valentine's day (14 February), and Coleridge frequently used bird images to describe his feelings both in his poetry and his letters. The engaging swing of the verse brings it close to a nursery rhyme, which effectively disguises a more adult passion.

#### 47. "A DAY-DREAM: MY EYES MAKE PICTURES"

First published in the *Bijou* magazine in 1828; collected in *Poetical Works* 1828. Composed shortly after Coleridge's clandestine three-week visit to the Hutchinson farm at Gallow Hill in Lancashire, in summer 1801, where the poem is set. The tender, erotic scenes under a willow by a fountain, and later in the firelit farmhouse kitchen, with both Asra and her sister Mary Hutchinson, the "two beloved women" (36), are later recalled in Coleridge's Notebooks of winter 1801-2, and recur in the "Letter to Sara Hutchinson" (No. 49) of the following spring. "Our sister and our friend" (12) are Dorothy and her brother Wordsworth, who was engaged to Mary at this time, and Coleridge seems to be continuing his fantasy of marrying Asra also. The plain but highly emotional language (there are fifteen exclamation marks in thirty-six lines) is skilfully contained within a tight lyric stanza, which floats away on a final feminine couplet. The traditional pastoral images - willow, fountain, moonlight, firelight, beehive - are all given a powerful sexual overtone, yet the effect is curiously innocent.

#### 48. "THE DAY-DREAM: IF THOU WERT HERE"

First published in the *Morning Post*, 19 October 1852 (following "The Language of Birds", No. 46); collected in *Poetical Works* 1828. The original newspaper subtitle, "From an Emigrant to his Absent Wife", and the



ambiguous reference to "Sara" (22), were both designed to disguise the true subject of the poem, which is Coleridge lying on his couch at Greta Hall having an erotic daydream about Asra in the firelit kitchen at Gallow Hill (7-24), until interrupted by little Hartley (27-8). In the Cornell ms. of the poem "Frederic" is explicitly called "Hartley". The theme is closely related to the previous poem (No. 47), with its similar title and stanzaic form; and contains tender images of firelight (9) and the warm breast of a nesting bird (19-20), which are carried over into the next poem (No. 49, "A Letter to Sara Hutchinson"). This erotic dream of Asra is also described in Coleridge's Notebook: "Prest to my bosom & felt there . . . I looked intensely towards her face - & sometimes I saw it - so vivid was the spectrum . . . sofa/lazy bed . . . the fits of Light & Dark from the Candle going out in the Socket . . . that last Image how lovely to me now." (CNB I, 985.) The intricate confusion of the dreamer's sexual identity (12-18) - is it the man, the woman, or the baby, who receives the kiss? - is characteristic of Coleridge's psychological subtlety, which in later work often seems to predict Jung's notions of the Anima.

#### 49. "A LETTER TO SARA HUTCHINSON"

First published from ms. at Dove Cottage Library in 1947, and by Cornell University Press in 1988. The central poem of the Asra group, and the first version of the famous "Dejection" (see No. 50), its existence was unknown until the mid-twentieth century. Composed rapidly in April 1802, perhaps during the single, stormy night of Sunday, 4-5 April in Coleridge's upstairs study at Greta Hall, where the poem is set, it is over double the length of "Dejection" (340 against 139 lines) and retains the authentic, headlong outpouring of a true love-letter, with much passion and much self-pity. It is not known if the original was actually sent to Asra. But one version was shown to Wordsworth within a fortnight (Dorothy, *Journal*, 21 April 1802); and chosen extracts to Coleridge's friends Poole, Sotheby, and Lord Beaumont.

The poem's twenty wild verse-paragraphs contain a clear, underlying structure of self-analysis: first Coleridge's remarkable description of mental depression, and the deadening of his feelings for natural beauty (**paras. 1-4**); a brief return to childhood hopes and longings which are unfulfilled (**para. 5**); then a series of reviving thoughts and erotic fantasies of Asra, inspired by a recent "guileless Letter" (125) she has sent him (**paras. 6-10**). Coleridge renounces hope of sharing an "Abiding Home" (135) with her, but gives a shrewd description of his marital unhappiness at Greta Hall, and guilty longings to leave his wife and be by Asra's bedside (**paras. 11-13**). The poem then moves dramatically back to the equinoctial storm, gathering outside Coleridge's study window at midnight (216), with images of violence and emotional release (**para. 14**). Coleridge then turns back to Asra, explaining his sense of lost youth (**para. 15**), the dulling of his creative powers in unhappy domesticity (**paras. 16-17**) and the frustrated love for

his children (**paras. 18–19**). Finally in a passionate, almost operatic climax Coleridge breaks out into an assertion of renewed, inward spiritual powers – the Soul’s “sweet and potent Voice of its own Birth” (305) – and wishes Asra unending joy in the living, natural world (334) which he will share as far as he can. For all its extravagance, the poem is one of the peaks of Romantic self-expression, containing a coherent philosophy of imagination, the “shaping Spirit” (241), an acute analysis of the creative personality, and a superb evocation of the Lake District in early spring. But it also remains a love-letter, and we will never know what Asra made of it.

#### 50. “DEJECTION: AN ODE”

First version published in the *Morning Post* on 4 October 1802 (Wordsworth’s wedding-day) addressed to “Edmund”; the version printed here collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817, addressed to an unidentified “Lady” viz. Asra. This is Coleridge’s brilliantly rehandled, public version of the previous “Letter to Sara Hutchinson” (see No. 49). Compressing the text from 340 to 139 lines, he reconstructed it as an irregular Pindaric ode with eight verse stanzas of different lengths. The Pindaric form makes use of sudden short lines and tightened rhymes, to give emotional and lyric force to particular passages. The major alterations begin at stanza IV, editing in passages from much later in the “Letter”, and centring the poem more impersonally on problems of imaginative feeling, emotional energy, and “joy” (the spiritual and psychological counter to depression). Coleridge reduced all explicit autobiographical material about his childhood, unhappy marriage and love affair to that contained in stanza VI.

From an intensely personal outpouring on Love – words for “love”, “beloved”, etc. appear twenty-one times in the “Letter”, but only once (“loveless”, 52) in “Dejection” – Coleridge fashioned a high philosophical meditation on the loss and recovery of the Imagination. It forms an immediate dialogue with Wordsworth’s contemporaneous “Ode: Intimations of Immortality in Early Childhood”, and is later answered by Keats (“Ode on a Grecian Urn”) and Shelley (“Ode to the West Wind”). Opening in a mood of “dull pain” and depression, “Dejection” questions the basis of human happiness, creativity and spiritual hope. Do the healing and renewing powers of Nature depend on human perception, the “fountains” within (stanza III)? Can the “shaping spirit of Imagination” itself be permanently destroyed by personal afflictions, and what Coleridge calls “abstruse research” – scholarship, philosophy itself (stanza VI)? (Some critics also gloss this as a disguised reference to opium addiction.) Or does the coming of the springtime equinoctial storms demonstrate that all natural energies, both in man and Nature, are renewed (stanza VII)? These profound, disabling doubts are not necessarily confirmed in the poem: they are given as the products of Coleridge’s own “wan and heartless mood” (25), which he attempts to dismiss as “viper thoughts” at the psychological turning point of the poem (94), which ends with the same “blessing” of joy as the earlier “Letter”.

The whole power and paradox of "Dejection" lies in this fact: that Coleridge can still write with unparalleled imaginative force about the threatened loss of the Imagination. The beautiful imagery of the rising wind, which commands the entire poem from the opening glimpse of the uneasy moon, is closely allied to the "spirit of Imagination" itself: the cleansing, fructifying late-winter wind (99-107), the Romantic *sturm*, which blasts through the terrible passivity of dejection to bring hope and rebirth. (Compare Shelley's "Destroyer and Preserver".) The immensely subtle and assured handling of this unifying wind-imagery is one of the technical achievements that distinguishes "Dejection" from the "Letter", together with its much greater stylistic and emotional control. All personal references are virtually suppressed, even such as that to Wordsworth and his poem or "lay" about "Lucy Gray" ("Letter", 210), altered to Thomas Otway, the young eighteenth-century playwright who died tragically young (120). But which is the more moving work of art - the spontaneous outpouring to Asra, or the profound meditation on imaginative renewal; the intimate letter or the formal ode?

#### 51. "SEPARATION"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. Composed during the first year of Coleridge's absence in Malta, where it appeared in a Notebook draft of 1804-5. The last three stanzas are so closely based on a seventeenth-century love lyric by John Cotton, "Ode to Chlorinda", that it is clear that Coleridge's poem began with a plagiarism, and then expanded to describe his own circumstances. (Compare No. 43 and No. 62.) Coleridge's Malta Notebooks are full of dreams about Asra, and the fantasy of winning her heart by military prowess may not have been so strange in the wartime atmosphere of the garrison at Valletta, where astonishingly Coleridge became First Secretary to the Governor, Sir Alexander Bail, one of Nelson's toughest admirals. Note the echoes of "Kubla Khan" (No. 74) in lines 11-12.

#### 52. "PHANTOM"

Composed, with a commentary, in Coleridge's Malta Notebook of 8 February 1805; first published *Poetical Works* 1834. Coleridge wrote: "Of Love in sleep, the seldomness of the feeling . . . a certain indistinctness, a sort of universal-in-particularness of form, seems necessary - *vide* my lines 'All look or likeness . . .' This abstract self is indeed in its nature a Universal personified - as Life, Soul, Spirit, etc." (CNB II. 2441.). The image of Asra as a figure on a tombstone may be drawn from Coleridge's memory of the Conyers tomb at Sockburn, where he first met her (see note to "Love", No. 35). But Asra is transfigured, rather than dead. The stone is "rified" (5) - that is, split or sundered - implying some sort of resurrection: an

escape from death, or time, or the material world. Her spirit shines (8) with the internal radiance that Coleridge always associated with transcendental energy. Such "emblems" of love and hope are frequent in Coleridge's later work.

53. "O SARA! NEVER RASHLY LET ME GO"

Composed in 1806-7, when it appears under the title "Nonsense", in a Notebook of the Coleorton period (CNB II: 2224 (48)) spent with Asra in Leicestershire after returning from Malta (see note to "To William Wordsworth" No. 30). Coleridge often used this "Nonsense" heading, or "Metrical Exercise", for experimental verse in which he was exploring half-formed ideas, dream images, or even "forbidden" themes, without committing himself to the idea of a serious or finished poem. It was a method of getting round inhibitions, of making space for the creative unconscious, similar to his use of translations. This poem seems to be about his physical desire for Asra, which he cannot consciously accept: the image of pure "streams" (3) contrasted with "melted Metals" (5) has an evident sexual connotation. Coleridge may be drawing on his memories of a metal foundry which he visited at Portsmouth just before his departure for Malta, and vividly described in a letter of April 1804.

54. "AD VILMUM AXIOLOGUM"  
(tr: "To William Wordsworth")

Original text in Latin hexameters, composed in a Notebook of 1807 while staying with Asra and the Wordsworths at Coleorton. (See note to No. 30.) Coleridge sometimes used Latin verse as an alternative way of expressing and ordering his feelings. The modern editor's translation, "Do you command me to endure Asra's neglect? . . ." is perhaps enough to give an idea of the "visceral" (7) strength of Coleridge's feeling for Asra, and his bitter resentment at the idea that Wordsworth was "forbidding" their love at Coleorton (1-8). Coleridge's Notebooks at this time record similar violent outbursts, confused masochistic fantasies and dreams, and even a terrible, jealous "vision" of Wordsworth in bed with Asra one Saturday morning - perhaps a result of Coleridge's heavy opium habit at this period. The decorous Latin should not hide the deliberate pathological note, as in Coleridge's reference to castration: "tear out my heart, and my eyes, or whatever is dearer. . . ." (9-10).

55. "YOU MOULD MY HOPES"

Text from a Coleorton ms. of about 1807; first published in *Poetical Works* 1912. Never titled by Coleridge, this lyric fragment may have been part of early drafts of a larger Asra poem (See also No. 56). There is a characteristic,

dreamlike movement between internal and external landscapes, dominated by shifting images of light and water. Here Coleridge's love seems completely unclouded by the doubts and jealousies described in No. 54. These violent swings of mood add to the mystery of the whole relationship, even if they were exaggerated by opium.

#### 56. "AN ANGEL VISITANT"

First published in *Literary Remains*, vol. I, 1836. Like the previous fragment, it is probably part of the Coleorton sequence of 1807, leading to "Recollections of Love" (No. 57), with which it shares the rhyme-scheme but not quite the metre. The secret grove of holly-bushes (1), a magic lover's bower within which Coleridge imagines himself flying with Asra, may have existed on the Coleorton estate or may be part of the Quantocks landscape transfigured through memory as in the next poem. (Compare Wordsworth's poem, "This is the Spot".) Wild woodbine has a white, scented flower in the late spring.

#### 57. "RECOLLECTIONS OF LOVE"

Composed at Nether Stowey, where Coleridge returned to stay with Tom Poole after eight years' absence (6) in the early summer of 1807; first published in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. (Compare the earlier setting of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison", No. 25). Coleridge's long walks over the Quantock hills, in an attempt to bring his opium addiction under control, released the flood of memories which shape this beautiful lyric. The dreamlike transpositions of time and place across eight years (stanza III); the melting of child and adult identities (stanza IV); and the interlayering of Somerset and Lake District landscapes (stanza V) – the River Greta flowed behind his house at Keswick – show Coleridge trying to distance and idealize his predestined love for Asra. This love is now presented as an experience of metempsychosis: the airborne "spirit" of the beloved (15) transmigrating from a previous existence (19). This process of "neo-Platonizing" his feelings for Asra reaches its climax in "Constancy to an Ideal Object" (No. 58). The effect of various kinds of soft natural sound – breathing (2), bird-song (10), flowing water (8, 28), sighing (13), whispering (27) – is subtly deployed to produce the poem's "under-song" (30), an enchanted and musical quality almost like a lullaby.

#### 58. "CONSTANCY TO AN IDEAL OBJECT"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1828. The last and perhaps the most mysterious of the Asra Poems. Coleridge probably added to it slowly over twenty years of composition between 1805 and 1825, as he reflected on the meaning of his love affair, which effectively ended when he left the Lake District in

autumn 1810 and Asra remained with the Wordsworth household. The unobtrusive pentameter couplets contain a marked shift in style, from formal to intimate, as the subtle, reflective poem progresses. Beginning with an abstract, metaphysical enquiry (somewhat in the manner of Coleridge's favourite seventeenth-century poet, Fulke Greville) about the nature of Ideal Love in an inconstant universe (1-10), the poem moves surprisingly to more concrete and autobiographical images from Coleridge's own life associated with Asra: sheltering from a storm (9), seeking for a cottage home (20), being becalmed on the sea (22), and climbing a mountain track at dawn (26). But this is no longer a love poem, or even a retrospective one. It is more like an examination of philosophical conscience. Throughout Coleridge addresses the platonic Ideal of Love as "you" or "thou" (the "Yearning Thought", (4) or "Fond Thought" (7) in his imagination) rather than Asra herself who is only referred to anonymously in the third person as "she" (12). The striking emblem of the becalmed Helmsman, obviously recalling "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (No. 32), may also refer to the classical tale of Palinurus, Odysseus's helmsman, lost overboard on the long return voyage to Ithaca (22-24). The haunting elusiveness of the poem, with its uneasy transitions (the cottage becomes a boat, the ocean becomes a mountainside) suggests obsessive reworkings of the text. Internal evidence might suggest it was begun while abroad in Malta (16-24); continued through the despairing period of 1810-14 (7-10); and finished in a more philosophic mood at Highgate in the 1820s. The image of the Brocken Spectre - "which the Author himself has experienced" - in the final lines (25-32) (12) comes from a passage in the *Aids to Reflection* of 1825: "The beholder either recognises it as a projected form of his own Being, that moves before him with a Glory round its head, or recoils from it as a Spectre." (See also No. 39. The Brocken Spectre is a rare atmospheric phenomenon produced by the sun's rays throwing the viewer's shadow horizontally forward on to low cloud or mist, and encircling it with a rainbow spectrum generated by diffraction of the light through water droplets. It can occur on any mountain top, at dawn or dusk; and also be observed from aircraft.) This is the central issue of the poem, which asks if Love is the pursuit of a shadow (32), a self-created illusion (compare William Blake's "spectres"); or if it is a beautiful Platonic reality, a projected form of the "dear embodied Good" (13) which really exists in our own being, in others, and in Eternity. Coleridge does not answer, or turn back to the memory of Asra for reassurance; thus the sequence ends in a shimmer of haunting uncertainty.

## Notes to the Confessional Poems

### 59. "AN ODE TO THE RAIN"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 7 October 1802; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Composed during August 1802, during the unexpected but very welcome visit of Coleridge's friends from London, Charles and Mary Lamb (41-2), on a picturesque tour of the Lakes, when as so often on such occasions, it rained. The "very worthy, but not very pleasant "other guest at Greta Hall" who was *de trop* (47), was possibly Sir Charles Boughton, a brilliant bore. Coleridge wrote on 21 September: "We have been plagued to death with a swarm of Visitors - I thought of having a Board nailed up at my Door with the following Words painted on it - Visited Out, & removed to the Strand, opposite St Clement's Church, for the benefit of Retirement." This note of comic exasperation is cleverly sustained throughout the poem, but the light-verse treatment of that most English of subjects - bad weather - is deceptive. Each stanza hints at more serious, inner psychological troughs of low pressure. Coleridge is insomniac, and lying alone in the dark like "a blind man" (stanza I); he suffers from chronic illness, particularly arthritic pains and stomach disorders (brought on by opium) (stanza II); he promises to commit himself (humorously) to write one more unfinishable book (stanza III); he needs to discuss private "pain and grief" with the Lambs (stanza IV); he will promise anything to get rid of his "guest" and be left alone (stanza V). The rain is a symbol of depression (see "Dejection: An Ode", No. 50), and the flippant handling of it disguises the agonized feelings to be revealed in the following poem, "The Pains of Sleep" (No. 60)

### 60. "THE PAINS OF SLEEP"

First published in *Christabel; Kubla Khan; The Pains of Sleep* 1816. It was printed immediately after "Kubla Khan" (see No. 70), with this note by Coleridge: "As a contrast to this vision, I have annexed a fragment of a very different character, describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease." Both poems are inspired by opium, but they are probably separated by four or five years, and by a gulf of experience. In style and subject, "The Pains of Sleep" clearly belongs to the later period of Confessional pieces, which began in the Lakes when Coleridge's opium addiction had become seriously disabling. The first known version was sent to Robert Southey on 11 September 1803; and a second to Tom Poole on 3 October. The subject is not opium-taking, but opium-withdrawal. The symptoms of withdrawal are now medically well-known: sweating, feverish shaking, muscular cramps, acute physical discomfort, diarrhoea and horrific nightmares. Both Coleridge's letters and Notebooks of this autumn vividly

describe all these symptoms (without fully understanding their cause), especially the bad dreams from which Coleridge frequently awoke screaming (37) loud enough to wake the whole household at Greta Hall or Grasmere. In one letter of 1803 he wrote: "But with Sleep my Horrors commence; & they are such, three nights out of four, as literally to *stun* the intervening day, so that more often than otherwise I fall asleep, struggling to remain awake . . ." (*Letters*, 13 September 1803.) The poem is then an accurate transcription of Coleridge's sufferings, but remains curiously reticent about exactly *what* horrors the dreams actually contained (18-32). Scenes of humiliation, powerlessness, sexual perversion, fear, violence and shame, seem to be suggested. The verse, with its short, rapid lines and gasping couplets, brilliantly enacts the panting and mumbling of the tortured dreamer.

#### 61. "TO TWO SISTERS"

First published in the *Courier* on 10 December 1807, under the pen-name "Siesti" (a disguise for his initials "STC"); reprinted with the entire central section removed (8-44) and falsely dated 1817 in *Poetical Works* 1834; not finally collected until 1880. This suggests Coleridge's sensitivity to the poem's personal revelations, about his desperate need for love and support during the crisis of his middle-life. The "two sisters" were Mary and Charlotte Brent, young women in their twenties then living in London with Mary's husband, John Morgan. Morgan was a businessman, who had been to Christ's Hospital, and made friends with Coleridge in Bristol; the Morgan household looked after Coleridge during the worst period of his opium addiction, 1810-1815, after his break with the Wordsworths, and became a substitute for the Grasmere household. Strange as it may seem, the poem clearly shows (21-29) that Coleridge was already consciously preparing Mary Morgan and Charlotte Brent for the emotional roles in his life once played by Mary Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson (see the *Asra* Poems). There is some evidence from his letters that Coleridge made sexual advances to the younger and prettier Charlotte, during opium episodes (consider 12-15). Indeed the whole poem is suffused with erotic imagery from the *Asra* sequence: the brooding mother dove (4-5), the sun melting the winter ice (13), the cosiness of the firelit room (45). In the final passage (45-52) Coleridge imagines all four women waiting for him in the same room, while he sits elsewhere in solitude, tenderly dreaming of them ("ah! dream and pine!"). As so often in these Confessional Poems, the informal, almost light-verse manner - here couplets which skilfully carry the impression of Coleridge's speaking voice - hide despairing undertones. Coleridge is also working on his personal mythology of middle-age: "disinheritance" by Nature, "guiltless" opium addiction, disappointed love, struggling solitary existence, and heroic spiritual exile.



## 62. "A TOMBLESS EPITAPH"

First published in No. 14 of *The Friend* on 23 November 1809; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. It is based on a translation from the seventeenth-century Italian poet Chiabrera whose famous collection of verse epitaphs (*Gli Epitaphi*) both Coleridge and Wordsworth were studying at this period. Wordsworth's version of this, the "Fifth Epitaph: for Ambrosio Salinero", is a literal rendering of twenty-three lines. Coleridge's is a greatly expanded one of forty lines, "imitated, though in the movements rather than the thoughts . . . from Chiabrera". The long opening section (1-16) is expanded from only four lines of Chiabrera's; the conventional imagery of Parnassus is transformed into one of Coleridge's Cumberland hill-walks (21-28); and the final vision of the Philosopher's cave (28-37) appears nowhere in the original. So Coleridge has subtly transformed the Italian text into a new English poem and an imaginary epitaph for himself. The invented name "Idoloclastes Satyrane" (1), meaning literally "the Mocker of Idols or Illusions" in public affairs and fashionable opinions (see 8-12), is based on Spenser's knight-errant Sir Satyrane in *The Faerie Queene*. Coleridge used the pseudonym "Satyrane" in his travel letters from Germany (also printed in *The Friend*), and saw his own newspaper essay-writing at this period 1809-12 partly in this quixotic light: a return to "ancient truths" (5) as against party factions. There follows a mythically heroic, but recognizable, account of Coleridge's own "unconquered" struggles in these middle years with opium addiction and mental depression (14-19); his continuing delight in the "Muse" of poetry and the whole field of literature, "the Parnassian forest" (19-23); and his critical investigations into the nature of poetic inspiration and its psychological origins "traced upward to its source" (23-28). (In classical mythology "Hippocrene" (24) is the fount of poetry which was struck from the side of Mount Helicon by the hooves of the winged horse Pegasus.) The final movement of the poem (28-40) similarly reflects Coleridge's philosophical researches, using a remarkable "cavern" image reminiscent both of Plato's cave and those of Kubla Khan. The characterization of Salinero as "docile, childlike" (37) could only be applied to Coleridge with a degree of irony, as perhaps he intended. The skill of the whole adaptation can best be gauged by comparing it with Wordsworth's literal one:

True it is that Ambrosio Salinero  
 With an untoward fate was long involved  
 In odious litigation; and full long,  
 Fate harder still! had he to endure assaults  
 Of racking malady. And true it is  
 That not the less a frank courageous heart  
 And buoyant spirit triumphed over pain;  
 And he was strong to follow in the steps  
 Of the fair Muses. Not a covert path

Leads to the dear Parnassian forest's shade,  
 That might from him be hidden; not a track  
 Mounts to pellucid Hippocrene, but he  
 Had traced its windings. – This Savona knows,  
 Yet no sepulchral honors to her Son  
 She paid, for in our age the heart is ruled  
 Only by gold. And now a simple stone  
 Inscribed with this memorial here is raised  
 By his bereft, his lonely, Chiabrera.

63. "THE PANG MORE SHARP THAN ALL"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. The date of composition is very uncertain. Fragments of this poem exist in MS., apparently from the period of Coleridge's crisis years in London, 1811–12; others are watermarked 1819, while the allegoric figures, and archaicisms ("guerçons" etc.) are characteristic of the late 1820s. The style, vocabulary and stanzaic forms are playful, mock-Spenserian. But all fragments contain the haunting central vision of the "magic Child" who has been lost (stanza IV), and this gives a mysterious bitterness to the poem, which Coleridge evidently re-wrote over many years.

Who or what is this magic Child? Is it Hartley? He is "Hope's last and dearest child, without a name" (stanza I); he is "the faery Boy that's lost and gone" (stanza V). He is distinguished from his playmates, "twin-births of his foster-dame" (25) who are a brother called "Esteem" and a sister called "Kindness" (stanza III). He has gone for ever, but left his image in Coleridge's "secret heart", like an image in Merlin's "crystal orb" (stanza IV). (Merlin's ball of magic glass or crystal (39–40) comes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto 2: the magic glass contains through necromancy all the lost dreams and unfulfilled desires of the world.) Coleridge suffers grievously from his loss of the magic Child; but the "pang more sharp" (46) comes when the sister Kindness dresses up in his "faded robe" and "inly shrinking" pretends to be the Child, thus "counterfeiting absent Love" (stanza V).

So one answer is that the magic Child is Love. In the allegory, Love departs and is replaced by Kindness and Esteem, who together play the cruel charade of "dressing up" in Love's clothes, as in a children's party game. (Compare Rupert Brooke's poem, "When Love has changed to Kindliness".) But a subtler reading, based on the central stanza IV, might be more symbolic: the magic Child is Coleridge's inward image of his own youth and creativity, "inised" (40) in the glass of imagination, but now powerless and languishing (43).

#### 64. "HOPE AND TIME"

First published under the title "Time, Real and Imaginary", using only the second stanza, in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Coleridge's preface note of 1817 claims that it was "a schoolboy poem", and explains the title as follows: "By Imaginary Time, I meant the state of a schoolboy's mind when on his return to school he projects his being in his daydreams, and lives in his next holidays, six months hence; and this I contrasted with real Time."

But the early ms. of the complete poem (given here) in two stanzas dates from 1807-11, and here Coleridge explains the meaning rather differently: "The title of the poem . . . should be Time Real and Time Felt: in the sense of Time in active youth, or activity with Hope and fullness of aim in any period; and (Time) in despondent, objectless manhood. - Time objective and subjective."

The autobiographical picture of Coleridge's childhood in the "great City rear'd" of stanza I, is close to that in "A Letter to Sara Hutchinson" (No. 49, stanza V). While the allegoric figures of two children, a sister and a brother, also appear in "The Pang More Sharp Than All" (No. 63); and the image of dreamlike, effortless running recurs in "Youth and Age" (No. 69). The children run with outstretched arms, hoping to fly, like ostriches with their undeveloped wings (17): another of Coleridge's characteristic bird-images of poetic power. But the allegory is mysterious. The girl, Hope, runs looking ever anxiously *backwards* into the past (21-22) while the boy, Time, runs with the *blind*, dreamlike innocence of childhood, oblivious to all perils in the future (23-25). The force of the poem, "a sort of Emblem" (14), lies in its unexpected modulation from the playful, careless joy of childhood in the "elfish Place" (16), to a grief-stricken, adult awareness of blindness and vulnerability.

#### 65. "THE SUICIDE'S ARGUMENT"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1828. A ms. draft dates from 1811, the period of Coleridge's quarrel with Wordsworth, and the start of his descent into the worst period of opium addiction, here described as "guilt, lethargy, despair" (9).

Coleridge's Notebooks and letters show that he seriously considered suicide during at least three periods of his life: in Italy 1806; in London 1811; in Bristol in 1813 - all closely connected to increased opium use and periods of enforced solitude. Stanza I echoes the grim Euripidian question: whether man was ever asked if he wanted to be born in the first place. Stanza II ("Nature's Answer") gives no Christian assurance whatever, but angrily threatens Coleridge with his culpable misuse of Nature's gifts. Coleridge here treats human life as a purely commercial contract between Man and Nature, in which the Suicide will be condemned if he returns damaged goods: "no worse for the wear? . . . Make out the inven'try" (5, 10). The reckless dactylic metre, which gradually collapses, suggests the running-

down of mechanical energy. This is an early use of the question-and-answer form in the Confessional Poems, dramatizing two irreconcilable aspects of Coleridge's feelings; a Freudian reading might see it as an argument between the Ego and the Super-Ego.

66. "THE VISIONARY HOPE"

First published in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817, and probably composed in the deepest period of Coleridge's despair, either in London or Bristol 1811-12. Even the energy of "The Suicide's Argument" (No. 65) has gone from the verse, which creeps along in low, exhausted, alternating rhymes. Coleridge's depression is represented as a chronic illness (4), which has led him like a captive into a conqueror's "feast" (8). But the screams of his nightmares (11-14) have already been identified with opium in "The Pains of Sleep" (No. 60), and Coleridge recognizes his inability to deny himself the source of "pain" (16). The "one Hope" (27) which would save him is a return of Love, the "inward bliss and boast" (17) of his previous life; and Coleridge implies that this alone would make him strong enough to resist opium. The bleak emotional power of the poem derives from the recognition of "Hope" as a moral imperative, upon which the motive for all human actions must ultimately be based. Coleridge's Notebooks of this period begin to develop a metaphysics of "Hope" as fundamental to all activity in nature (see No. 19).

67. "HUMAN LIFE"

First published in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817, and probably composed towards the end of Coleridge's crisis period, while starting to work on the *Biographia Literaria* in 1815 at Calne in Wiltshire with the Morgan family (see No. 61 and note). This bitter meditative poem is constructed in the form of two sonnets, using a tight metaphysical style reminiscent of Fulke Greville and John Donne (see "On Donne's Poetry", No. 84). The possibility that man was a purely physical creature, without immortal soul or spiritual purpose (5-9), and a mere evolutionary "accident" of Nature (10-14), was never openly expressed by Coleridge in his published prose. But it recurs frequently in the later Confessional poetry. The implication for Coleridge, explored in the second stanza, is that not merely personal hopes and dreams (15-16) but even expressions of fellow feeling and sympathy for others, therefore become meaningless (19-24). Coleridge is left with a negation of the entire moral universe, so that human "being" is itself a contradiction in terms (29). The apparently abstract, fretful language frequently clarifies into vivid physical images: the beehive full of unproductive drones (9); the beautiful "vase" of Nature's conscious creation (11); the sinister mourner in the cowed hood (21). The poem refers to several of Coleridge's darker, metaphysical obsessions: the German philosopher Schelling's idea that man

might be an "unconscious" creation of Nature, the product of a moment of distraction (13-14); and the almost mystical idea of man as an existential paradox, an echo of himself, a shadow of his own shadow, brought into being simply by his own fantasy of himself (23). Coleridge explored this terrible "negative" world further in "Limbo" (No. 68.)

#### 68. "LIMBO"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. This disturbing poem suggests Coleridge's slow emergence from addiction and depression in his early forties, with a more daring exploration of the experiences he had survived. Looking back in a letter of 14 September 1828, Coleridge said it was the "pretended fragment" of a poet's soliloquy in a madhouse, and that it contained "some of the most forcible lines with the most original imagery that my niggard Muse ever made me a present of." A longer draft exists in a Notebook probably dating from 1811-15 (CNB III. 4073-4). Coleridge marked one of the rejected passages: "A specimen of the Sublime dashed to pieces by cutting too close with the fiery Four-in-Hand round the corner of Nonsense". In another ms. Coleridge unexpectedly compared "Limbo" with the much earlier "Phantom" (No. 52): "Another fragment, but in a very different style, from a Dream of Purgatory, alias Limbus." The comparison seems to be based on the conscious use of dream imagery in both poems.

Coleridge's "Purgatory" of the mind has two states, each with their corresponding physical settings. The first is the night-mare "Limbo" with which the poem opens and closes, a "crepuscular" or twilight (4) place of horror, where Time has become a ghastly impotent figure, so withered up that he cannot carry a scythe in his husk-like hands ("branny hands"). Here the spirit is jailed in a prison of non-being (21-26), and threatened with "positive Negation" (28). The second Limbo state is the moonlit garden, with its magical setting, which occupies the central section of the poem (9-20). Here Time has become a human figure: an Old Man standing outside at night, staring up at the moon (13-19). Like the Boy in "Hope and Time" (No. 64) the old man is blind (12). But with his "eyeless face all eye" (16) he can still somehow commune with the moon, and the joy he feels at this seems to promise some kind of salvation (18). These two contrasting states of Limbo reflect the polarities of Coleridge's mind at this stage in his career. The radiant moon, an emblem of the Imaginative vision since "Frost at Midnight", still offers the possibility of transcendence. But the final blankness of a "future state" also threatens Coleridge with the curiously mathematical, Newtonian horror of a positive negative (28).

#### 69. "YOUTH AND AGE"

First published with two stanzas only (1-38) in the *Bijou* 1828; collected as three stanzas (1-49) in *Poetical Works* 1834. The shorter and more playful

version appears in a MS. dated 10 September 1823, probably written while Coleridge was on his annual autumn holiday at Ramsgate (see "Fancy in Nubibus" No. 17 and "Aria Spontanea" No. 90). The final stanza (39-49), which considerably darkens the tone of the whole, is much later and originally appeared as part of "An Old Man's Sigh: A Sonnet" in *Blackwood's Magazine*, June 1832.

Coleridge had bitter feelings about his premature physical ageing, partly caused by his opium addiction, and sadly recalls his youthful hill-walking and sea-bathing (9-12). Many visitors to Highgate after 1819, such as Keats, Carlyle, and John Stuart Mill, noted his "drooping gait", heavy bulk and thick white hair (34-35). The "trim skiffs" (12) to which he compares his youthful self, were the early paddle-steamers which began to appear on the Thames and elsewhere after 1820. The psychologically acute imagery of old age as a form of charade, dressing-up, or grotesque fancy-dress party (27-32), is prepared for in "The Pang More Sharp Than All" (No. 63). The sonnet of 1832 also contains a familiar bird-image after line 41:

That only serves to make us grieve,  
In our old age,  
Whose bruised wings quarrel with the bars  
Of the still narrowing cage.

Coleridge's mocking complaints against his ageing body begin as early as 1807 when he writes in his Notebook "O 'tis a crazy tenement, this Body, a ruinous Hovel, which the striving Tenant, tired out with the idle toil of patching it, deserts and leaves to the sap of the sure silent fire . . ." (CNB II. 3189). But this beautiful, quick, almost dance-like verse achieves a note of humorous pathos about the universal condition of ageing.

#### 70. "THE GARDEN OF BOCCACCIO"

First published in the *Keepsake* 1829, with an engraved illustration by Stothard; collected in *Poetical Works* 1829. It was composed at Highgate in spring 1827, inspired by the gift of an exotically illustrated edition of *The Tales of Boccaccio*, given to Coleridge by Mrs Ann Gillman, his friend and confidante for the last eighteen years of his life (11-16). Mrs Gillman was the young wife of Coleridge's landlord and doctor, the brilliant surgeon James Gillman, who finally brought Coleridge's opium addiction and depression more or less under control after 1816. Ann Gillman can be considered as the last of Coleridge's muse-figures, and her presence gives this relaxed, genial poem its playful, amorous undertone, and the atmosphere of magic calm and acceptance similar to the late "Byzantium" poems of W. B. Yeats.

The poem develops in three parts: an opening description of one of Coleridge's still-recurrent depressions, which threatens opium until distracted by the Boccaccio book (1-24); then an autobiographical account

of Coleridge's search from boyhood for an ideal love which is revealed first as Poetry, and then as Philosophy (25-56); finally a joyful evocation of the pastoral, idealized Italian landscape of the illustrations, into which Coleridge physically enters - "I see no longer! I myself am there!" (65) - thereby curing his depression by imaginative (and also erotic) displacement into the world of art (57-109). The poem also reflects the fashionable cult of the Mediterranean South, "star-bright Italy" (77), championed by the younger Romantics like Shelley, Byron, Hunt and Keats, after 1818.

Coleridge also celebrates alongside Boccaccio, the other reading-worlds that had given him pleasure in earlier days: the Norse sagas, the Greek legends, the medieval European tales (33-43). "Skalds" (35) are the Scandinavian warrior gods. "Hertha" (38) is the goddess of Norse fertility. "Old Maeonides" (98) is Homer. "Ovid's Holy Book of Love" (100) is the *Ars Amoris*.

#### 71. "PHANTOM OR FACT"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. There is no evidence as to the exact date of composition, but probably about 1830 at Highgate when Coleridge was in his late fifties. The poem concerns the disillusion of late middle-age, and the loss of the sense of youth, as in "The Pang More Sharp Than All" (No. 63), but seen at a greater distance and with a certain wistful irony. The dialogue form (compare "The Suicide's Argument", No. 65) now allows Coleridge to stand outside this retrospective vision of the "wild disastrous change" (16) which took place in the "Author's" life.

As The Friend suggests, the short "riddling" incident deliberately contains many puzzles. The visionary figure who appears at the "Author's" bedside seems to be his "own" youthful spirit. The "Author" can barely ("unneth", 4) control the implications of this idea, which suggest how far he has fallen from grace. Yet the beauty and tenderness of the figure (1-3) implies that she is actually a woman, who "woos" and loves him; and her sudden "shrinking back" and almost physical revulsion at what he has become (9-10), uncannily recalls Christabel's shrinking back from Geraldine. Perhaps the "lovely form" is really a Muse figure, half transposed (compare No. 72, lines 22-23). In the final lines the "Author" suggests that what began as an imaginative contradiction in his art ("a fragment from the life of dreams") was eventually "matured" into an inescapable conflict ("the silent strife") in his actual life (17-20). This reversal of categories between art and life is frequent in the later poetry, and emphasizes Coleridge's sense of philosophic detachment and acceptance.

#### 72. "LOVE'S APPARITION AND EVANISHMENT"

First published in an anthology, *Friendship's Offering*, 1834; collected in *Poetical Works* 1834. Coleridge dated the ms. August 1833, the last year of his life. This beautiful, melancholy vision is set in the back garden of

the Gillmans' house at 3 The Grove, Highgate, where Coleridge had his "garden-bower" (II) overlooking Hampstead Heath and Caen Wood. The "ruined well" (3) symbolizes the springs of poetic inspiration run dry; but the "couch of camomile" (12) is a herb of refreshment and healing.

Many earlier poems are deliberately echoed. The "blind" Arab (I) recalls the similar poetic nomad in "The Blossoming of the Solitary Date Tree" (No. 77). Coleridge as the old man with the "eyeless face" (8) recalls the figure of Time in "Limbo" (No. 68). The "garden-bower" (II) brings back the garden of Nether Stowey in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (No. 26). "Hope" as Love's sister recalls the figures of "The Pang More Sharp Than All" (No. 63). "Life in Death" (27), a favourite conceit of Coleridge's in old age, reaches right back to the hallucinations of the *Mariner*.

The despairing tone of the poem is subtly modulated by its lyric grace, especially in the song-like lilt of the final eight lines, which promise conciliation. If Hope can die "anew" (28), it follows that she can also be "woken" again into life. From 1852 editors perversely added a wholly despairing four-line "Envoy" to the poem, which crushes out this delicate ambiguity. But it was written much earlier in 1824, and was deliberately omitted by Coleridge from the final text:

#### *L'Envoy*

In vain we supplicate the Powers above;  
There is no resurrection for the Love  
That, nursed in tenderest care, yet fades away  
In the chill'd heart by gradual self-decay.

One might better cite a couplet from another fragment of 1829 ("Love, Hope and Patience"):

But Love is subtle, and doth proof derive  
From her own life that Hope is yet alive.

#### 73. "EPITAPH"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. The MS. is dated 9 November 1833, some eight months before Coleridge's death at Highgate.

Coleridge was fond of writing his own epitaph, and there are six MS. versions of this one, sent separately to friends including Tom Poole, J. H. Green, John Lockhart and Mrs Charles Aders. Mrs Aders was arranging, at Coleridge's request, a tomb-stone design by the artist Maria Denman. Maria Denman had added the voluptuous figure of a Muse, but Coleridge objected to this in a letter of November 1833: "... (these) homely, plain, churchyard Christian verses would not be in keeping with a Muse (tho' a lovelier I



never wooed), nor with A Lyre, or Harp, or Laurel, or aught else Parnassian or allegorical . . . If any figure rather that of an elderly man – ‘thoughtful, with quiet tears upon his cheek’”. The quotation is from his own poem, “A Tombless Epitaph” of twenty years before (No. 62). In several of his letters, Coleridge explained the ambiguous penultimate line of the Epitaph – “Mercy for praise – to be forgiven for fame” (7) – as meaning “give me Mercy instead of praise, give me Forgiveness instead of fame”. This replaces literary glory with Christian humility in a becoming manner. But the alternative meaning, characteristically proud and guilty, remains open: “have mercy on me for Praise received, forgive me for Fame achieved”. Perhaps both readings are allowable. Coleridge once glossed the “Punic Greek” of his initials “STC” (4) as being a transliteration of ΕΣΤΗΣΕ – “he has stood”, that is “kept faith”. To Lockhart he glossed them in Latin: “stetit: restat: resurget”. This could be rendered as: “he has stood; he now rests; he shall rise again.”

## Notes to the Visionary Fragments

### 74. “KUBLA KHAN”

First published in *Christabel; Kubla Khan, A Vision; The Pains of Sleep*, 1816. The date of composition, like much else about this celebrated “fragment” (including the fact of it *being* a fragment) is the subject of lively dispute among scholars. The original version almost certainly belongs to the late autumn of 1797, when Coleridge made several walking expeditions over the Quantocks to the coast; Dorothy refers to the poem’s existence in 1798; and Coleridge was known to have recited it in London in 1799. But no ms. exists from this period.

A later draft, with slight textual variants (“twice six miles”, 6; “Mount Amara”, 41) was discovered in 1934 and probably belongs to about 1810. Known as the Crewe MS., it contains a circumstantial postscript by Coleridge: “This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium, taken to check a dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock & Lynton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, in the fall of the year, 1797.”

By 1816 Coleridge had expanded this account to form the preface, identifying his source in Samuel Purchas’s *Pilgrimage* (1614, Book 4, Chapter 13), telling his famous story of the interruption by the “person on business from Porlock” (never subsequently identified); and using a passage from his own poem “The Picture” (No. 44) – “then all the charm is broken” – to introduce the informing analogy between water and inspiration. The preface thus became an integral part of the “Kubla Khan” fragment and,

with its emphasis on the "psychology" of poetic creation, suggests that creative inspiration and its loss is itself the central subject.

In the poem Coleridge draws an extended analogy between the creation of an earthly paradise in the Orient, walled and domed, by the Tartar warlord Kubla Khan and the poet's creation of an imaginary paradise with its "sacred river" of inspiration (1-36). He then laments its loss, and hopes for the "revival" of his poetic powers (37-54), in imagery drawn from Plato's classical description of inspired poets in the *Ion*, who "like Bacchic maidens, draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus, but not when they are in their right minds". The paradisaical landscape has strong local echoes of the Quantock region and its romantic folklore (12-16), while the spasmodic eruptions of the "mighty fountain" (17-24) obscurely suggest the "panting" effort of childbirth or even sexual orgasm, as a further analogy of poetic creation. There is a clear indication of a shift or pause after line 36, with the introduction of the black Muse figure with her symbolic "dulcimer" (compare Apollo's lyre), and a recapitulation of the "dome" and "cavern" themes (37-47). This might indicate a retrospective coda, or even a later addition.

Modern criticism, with its search for image-patterns and textual sources, has tended to overlook the hypnotic chant and exquisite dance-movement of the verse, which brilliantly enacts the trance-like state of inspiration itself. For Coleridge it was essentially a recitation piece, the signature-tune of his genius, and there are several accounts of his performing it. Charles Lamb wrote in April 1816: "Coleridge is printing Xtable by Ld Byron's recommendation to Murray, with what he calls a vision, Kubla Khan - which said vision he repeats so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and Elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it."

#### 75. "THE WANDERINGS OF CAIN"

Various fragments of this unfinished epic in "three cantos" appeared in Coleridge's lifetime. The verses, "Encinctured with a twine of leaves", from "Canto I" were first published separately as a footnote to the conclusion of his *Aids to Reflection*, 1825; the prose "Canto II" was first published in the *Bijou* magazine, 1828; the whole fragment with its preface in *Poetical Works* 1828. The ms. of an alternative prose outline of the entire poem by Coleridge, was published in the *Athenaeum* magazine on 27 January 1894. No "Canto III" is known, or any contribution by Wordsworth.

The date of composition is problematic. Coleridge says the original belongs to his collaboration with Wordsworth of 1798; but he also adds in the preface that the verses belong to a later period, "years afterward", when friends suggested that he "commence anew", probably at Highgate after 1820; and this may also be true of parts of the prose "Canto II". The preface, with its psychologically acute account of the failed collaboration ("and the Ancient Mariner was written instead"); the fickleness of

inspiration ("adverse gales") and the unreliability of artistic memory ("the palimpsest tablet" – i.e. a wax tablet over-written several times) has become a significant part of the fragment, as with "Kubla Khan".

Coleridge had considered writing an epic poem on "The Origins of Evil" as early as 1796. He always remained fascinated with the biblical figure of Cain, the first murderer and archetypal social outcast, together with his innocent little son Enos (the "lovely Boy" of the verse) who accompanied him in his exile. The verse fragment, with its haunting opening, is based on Coleridge's *Athenaeum* ms. of the poem's outline, which gives the following summary of "Canto I": "Child afeared by his father's ravings, goes out to pluck the fruits in the moonlight wildness. Cain's soliloquy. Child returns with a pitcher of water and a cake. Cain wonders what kind of beings dwell in that place – whether any created since man or whether this world had any beings rescued from the Chaos, wandering like shipwrecked beings from another world etc." The prose "Canto II" describes the wanderings of Cain and Enos: their rejection by Nature, their search for food in an inhospitable landscape of desolation, and their terrible meeting with the ghost of the murdered Abel. The stony landscape was based on Coleridge's memories of the "Valley of Rocks", with its bleak "steeple and battlements" of eroded stone, beyond Lynton on the north Somerset coastline. The main interest lies in the attempt to create the framework of a gothic epic out of biblical prose, and to imitate the effortless unfolding of dream narrative. "And Cain stood like one who struggles in his sleep because of the exceeding terribleness of a dream". It also indicates the huge body of work that could lie behind a single remaining verse fragment.

#### 76. "THE MAD MONK"

First published in the *Morning Post*, 13 October 1800; first collected in *Poetical Works* 1880. The original title was: "The Voice from the Side of Etna; or the Mad Monk: an Ode in Mrs Ratcliffe's Manner." Anna Radcliffe (1764–1823) was the popular author of gothic-horror plays and novels, whose work Coleridge enjoyed but mocked in some early reviews. The element of gothic pastiche should not obscure Coleridge's own presence in the voice of the depressed, love-lorn "hermit or monk" (5), a familiar figure from the *Asra* Poems. Though the death of "Rosa" (33) is intended as a fragment of melodrama, the lover's guilt-ridden hallucination of the entire landscape suffused in her blood (29–45) contains an uneasy premonition of "Dejection: An Ode" (No. 50), and yields some startling images: "the sun torments me from his western bed" (42, compare "A Sunset", No 78).

The beautiful music of the verse evidently haunted Wordsworth, who used a close adaptation of the second stanza, "There was a time when earth, and sea, and sky . . ." (9–16) as the opening of one of his most famous

poems, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality", begun eighteen months later in March 1802: "There was a time when meadow, grove and stream. . . ." (Indeed it is possible that Wordsworth first gave these lines to Coleridge before the "Ode" was conceived.)

A possible source for the grief-stricken hermit is Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, Chapter 21, "The Happiness of Solitude. The Hermit's History". This opens: "They came on the third day, by the direction of the peasants, to the hermit's cell: it was a cavern in the side of a mountain, over-shadowed with palm-trees . . . The Princess observed that he had not the countenance of a man that had found, or could teach, the way to happiness." Coleridge eventually visited Sicily (8) and climbed Etna for himself (twice), at a time of great unhappiness in 1804-5.

#### 77. "THE BLOSSOMING OF THE SOLITARY DATE-TREE"

First published with Preface in *Poetical Works* 1828. Composed in Malta during the hot summer months of 1805, when Coleridge was Public Secretary to the British Governor, Sir Alexander Ball, and staying at his summer palace of San Antonio outside Valletta. The botanical gardens of San Antonio are still famous, and Coleridge kept extensive notes of his botanical reading (including Linnaeus) and nature studies and observations there. The phenomenon of the "fruitless" (because unpollinated) date-tree can be found in many other species such as the rowan. For Coleridge it is another image of unfulfilled creativity: "blossom" being something showy and ephemeral (like talk), while "fruit" is nourishing and lasting (like poetry). Coleridge's preface again explores the question of fragmentary work (suggesting that some "congenial spirit" might versify the prose for him!). The declared theme of "the yearning of a human soul for its counterpart", and the solitary being who cannot bear "fruit" until inspired by a predestined other, is similar to Goethe's idea of "elective affinities", and closely related to the *Asra* Poems. The beautiful third stanza can be read as Coleridge's personal credo, with the central idea of the poet keeping the "buoyant child" (21) creatively alive in the adult (compare "The Pang More Sharp Than All", No. 63). Coleridge also explores the idea that "incompleteness" like his own is really part of Nature's generosity, "her largeness, and her overflow" (26). Many other images, such as the "blind Arab" (30), recur in the later Confessional Poems.

#### 78. "A SUNSET"

First published in J. D. Campbell's edition, *Poetical Works* 1893; Campbell also supplied the title. Composed in Malta 1804-5, with a commentary by Coleridge in a Notebook dated 16 August 1805. "These lines I wrote as nonsense verses merely to try a metre; but they are by no means contemptible; at least in reading them over I am surprised to find them so good.

Now will it be a more English music if the first and fourth [*lines*] are double rhymes and the fifth and sixth single rhymes? or all single, or the second and third double? Try." (CNB II. 2224(29)) Though Coleridge's primary concern seems to be the "music" of the verse, the visionary landscape of mountains, "ancient" woods, caves and fountains has a Delphic quality – viz. prophetic – reminiscent of "Kubla Khan" (No. 74), though its meaning remains obscure. "Cone or mow of fire" (5): an image drawn from a corn-stook ("mow") at harvest-time, drawn into a cone-shaped bundle before being carted away, as the splayed shafts of sunlight are gathered together in a single "stook" of fire before descending below the horizon. The sun's symbolic departure from the earth, "submitting" (5) his great power to moon-like uncertainty and change, suggests some premonition of natural disaster in the world, at which the leaves tremble and the fountain mutters uneasily (12–13). This disaster may be the loss of Life, or Love or Hope; or there may be some suggestion, after the manner of the German poet Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825), of the retirement of God from His creation.

#### 79. "A DARK SKY" [COELI ENARRANT]

First published in E. H. Coleridge's edition of *Poetical Works* 1912, with the editor's curious title – "Coeli Enarrant", "Heaven's Witness" – inexplicably in Latin. Composed at Nether Stowey in 1807 while Coleridge was revisiting his old Quantock haunts, with this note: "I wrote these lines in imitation of Du Bartas as translated by our Sylvester." (CNB II. 3107).

The French sixteenth-century religious poet Du Bartas wrote an epic account of the Seven Days of the Creation, which was translated first by Sir Philip Sydney, and then by Joshua Sylvester in *Divine Weekes and Works*, 1608. Using Du Bartas's images, Coleridge reverses the traditional and consoling religious trope of the night sky as God's alphabet book (6), in which men may read His design and learn His benevolence. (Compare "Invisible Powers", No. 96): "... For all that meets the bodily sense I deem / Symbolical, one mighty alphabet...") Instead, Coleridge now presents a vision of terror and religious doubt, in which the stars have become rebellious "spies" (2–3), and the Heavenly "book" has become a grim "Black Letter" Bible (7) wielded by a cruel schoolmaster (8). The Black Letter was the Old English or German Bible, printed in the heavy, black gothic typeface of the seventeenth-century printers, and still often used in schools. Coleridge was perhaps recalling the violence of his old headmaster James Bowyer, overseeing his schoolboy "task" or prep (9) at Christ's Hospital, where Bowyer was reputed once to have knocked out a boy's teeth with one of these Bibles. The cry of schoolboy fear and submission (10), is also the mouthed shape of "O" – zero, nothing, an empty universe to which a "groaning" world must submit. So loss of religious

faith reduces Coleridge to the condition of a terrified child – hunted and spied on by the stars, bullied and beaten by a “darkened” (2) Heaven.

#### 80. “THE TROPIC TREE”

First published in E. H. Coleridge’s edition of *Poetical Works* 1912. A draft appears in Coleridge’s Notebooks of 1807 and may possibly have been written at Coleorton where Coleridge was staying with the Wordsworths and Asra (CNB II. 3004). This puzzling but vivid fragment describes a huge and isolated tree, growing on the banks of a tropical river (1–6). A grotesque tribal totem or carved idol is mounted in the fork of its branches for pagan worship (7–8). Beneath the tree sits a tribal priest or “Faquir” (9). Above, in the spreading branches of the tree, some unidentified “Horror” broods (10–11). In the ms. draft Coleridge also describes the idol as “the nail-boss’d Santon”: viz., a wooden Hindu idol with nails hammered into it to denote ritual worship. But the repetition of the words “horror” and “horrid” suggest human sacrifice or even cannibalism. The poem has the form of an unfinished sonnet (requiring a third rhyme-line, and a closing couplet), and is clearly emblematic or symbolic, but no critic has interpreted it successfully. An earlier fragment of 1804 describes a similar scene: a huge alder tree, with “vast hollow Trunk”, hanging above a river, its sinister branches with “elk-like head/And pomp of antlers”. Both poems present images of monstrous power. Coleridge’s Notebooks of this period record extensive reading of anthropological studies of African and Caribbean superstitions; and also of Coleridge’s growing jealousy of Wordsworth’s poetic self-confidence and emotional domination of the women in the Coleorton household, and their “idolatry” of him. These two ideas may be unconsciously fused in the fragment. Nine years later, in Chapter 22 of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge compared Wordsworth’s imagination “by a fantastic analogue and similitude” to a rocky African landscape producing a few huge trees, “the gigantic Black Oak, Magnolia Magniflora . . . and a few stately Tulip Trees”.

#### 81. “PSYCHE”

First published in the *Biographia Literaria* 1817; collected in the *Literary Remains* 1836. Coleridge’s original prefatory note reads: “the fact that in Greek ‘Psyche’ is the common name for the soul, and the butterfly, is thus alluded to in the following stanzas from an unpublished poem of the Author.” No further stanzas are known. Another ms. note reads: “in some instances the Symbolic and the Onomastic are united as in Psyche = Anima et papilio.” The fragment was composed about 1808, and draws on extensive botanical notes on the life-cycle of the caterpillar, and the “great agony” of their physiological metamorphosis into “the winged state”, taken from a scientific textbook in spring 1803. The fragment is in the

"emblematic" (2) style of the seventeenth-century religious poets like George Herbert and Francis Quarles, in which natural objects are presented for spiritual meditation. But Coleridge swiftly directs attention away from the immortal aspect of the butterfly-soul (3-4), and concentrates instead on its earthly aspect as caterpillar-soul, the "reptile's lot" (5). The caterpillar "psyche" is condemned to futile and painful wriggling, as it eats and destroys the green leaves which nourish it (5-7); just as human beings destroy the tender substances (love, trust, hope) which nourish them. (William Blake's "Sick Rose" achieves a similar vision, though in an utterly different style.)

82. "THE SEA MEW"

First published in E. H. Coleridge's edition, *Poetical Works* 1912. Originally composed in a Notebook of 1795-6, when Coleridge probably observed the sea-bird flying over the Bristol Channel. But Coleridge's fascination with the symbolism of bird-flight and bird-song developed steadily, and closely connects this with the next fragment (No. 83). In both cases, the bird is the emblem of the poet at work, seen in different moods. (The analogy between birds and poetry - flying, singing, trapped or caged - is so frequent in Coleridge's letters and notebooks that it deserves a separate study.) Here the unbroken, sliding, blank-verse sentence suggests the creative "drifting" of the poet's imagination, "posting" forward through the air and then "yielding" freely to the cross-currents of ideas. (Later Coleridge described similar analogies with the movement of water-beetles, in Chapter 7 of the *Biographia Literaria*.)

83. "THE YELLOW HAMMER"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1912. Composed in a Notebook of 1807-8, perhaps when Coleridge had returned to the Quantocks. See previous note. Here the tight, end-stopped lines and laborious metre of the couplets, together with the image of metal-working with a file, suggests the patient, meticulous, craftsmanlike skill of the poet polishing and refining his work. Both birds present characteristic aspects of Coleridge's poetry.

84. "ON DONNE'S POETRY"

First published in the *Literary Remains* 1836. Written in the fly-leaf of a copy of *Chalmers's Poets*, which Coleridge was reading at Highgate in 1816-18. Coleridge was one of the first modern critics to re-direct attention to the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets. He wrote in Chapter 1 of the *Biographia Literaria*: "... From Donne to Cowley, we find the most fantastic out-of-the-way thoughts, but in the most pure and genuine mother English ... Our faulty elder poets sacrificed the passion and passionate flow of poetry, to the subtleties of intellect, and to the starts of wit." The verse

fragment compresses and enacts these critical observations, with an affectionate mimicry (rather than a parody) of Donne's style, with its tortuous phrasing and almost ludicrously ingenious metaphors – dromedary riding, iron forging, print (or cider?) pressing. "Fancy's maze and clue" (3): the original meaning of "clue" was a ball of yarn, and hence a direction-guide to unroll through a maze (as Theseus did through the Minotaur's labyrinth). "Meaning's press and screw" (4): the image is drawn from the old hand-operated printing presses, or fruit presses, both of which used a pressure-plate operated by a helical screw. Coleridge had used a cider press in the Quantocks, and a printing press in the Lake District.

#### 85. "THE KNIGHT'S TOMB"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. James Gillman said he heard Coleridge reciting these lines "as an experiment in metre", in the early days at Highgate 1816–19. The form suggests that it is the fragment of an unwritten ballad, possibly even the unknown Part III of "Christabel", with the Lake District setting (3), the medieval figure of the knight, and the haunting sense of seasons passing. The last three lines were also overheard at Highgate by a friend of Sir Walter Scott's (probably his son-in-law and future biographer, Lockhart), who repeated them to the novelist the following day. They subsequently appeared as an unauthorized epigraph to Chapter 8 of Scott's *Ivanhoe* 1819; and later, complete and acknowledged, in *Castle Dangerous* 1834. Scott was known to be a great admirer, and even imitator, of "Christabel". One reading of the fragment is that it represents Coleridge's farewell to the ballad, an inspired poetic landscape to which he cannot return; or more generally to the Lake District where he can never recapture his happy life with the Wordsworths. Coleridge is himself the dead knight, buried in his favourite spot on Helvellyn, among his unfinished creation.

#### 86. "FOUR METRICAL EXPERIMENTS"

First published in E. H. Coleridge's edition, *Poetical Works* 1912. They are collected from a vast number of MS. sources dating between 1801–1820. One Malta Notebook of 1805 contains no less than forty-eight numbered specimens of different metres and stanzaic schemes, many from German and Italian sources. Coleridge frequently illustrated his discoveries with rough verse-sketches dismissively entitled "Nonsense Verse", "Experiment in Metre", or the technical name of a metre, or simply of the mood or feeling evoked by it. But many of them seem rather more than "nonsense", and like the four selected here, are of striking beauty and haunting musical power.



## 87. "SONG FROM REMORSE"

First published in Act III, Scene 1, of Coleridge's Spanish melodrama *Remorse* 1813; collected in *Poetical Works* 1828. The play was originally written in 1797 as *Osorio*, and sent to Sheridan at Drury Lane, but was refused. Coleridge recovered the ms. from Godwin (who had the only remaining copy) in 1812, rewrote it, and had it produced with brilliant success at Drury Lane in January 1813, where it ran for twenty nights, an outstanding run for a "literary" verse drama at that period. The text, issued simultaneously, also ran to three editions; and the play was revived in 1817. Commercially, *Remorse* was the greatest single success of Coleridge's career, earning three years' income (£400 plus copyright) in three weeks. It is set in Spain during "the reign of Philip II, just at the close of the Civil Wars against the Moors", and concerns the rivalry between two aristocratic brothers, Don Alvar (1797: Albert) and Don Ordonio (1797: Osorio), who have both fallen in love with a beautiful "orphan Heiress", Dona Teresa (1797: Maria). Act III, Scene I, takes place in the "Hall of Armory" of their fifteenth-century castle on the coast of Granada, with a musical instrument "of Glass or Steel" playing behind the arras. Alvar, who is thought by his villainous younger brother Ordonio to have been assassinated (on Ordonio's own orders), has disguised himself "in a Sorcerer's robe" and pretends to summon up his own departed spirit with this "Song" of invocation to the dead: "Soul of Alvar!/Hear the mild spell, and tempt no blacker charm . . . /Pass visible before our mortal sense!". The "Song" is based on the medieval Christian rites of Intercession for the Dead (5-10) with its repeated Latin chant "Have Mercy, O Lord". But it is also intended by Alvar to threaten Ordonio with the prospect of a vengeful ghost; and by Coleridge as a fragment of pure verbal witchery and incantatory magic.

## 88. "SONG FROM ZAPOLYA"

First published in Act II, Scene 1, of Coleridge's *Zapolya*, 1817; collected in *Poetical Works* 1834. Coleridge composed *Zapolya* at Calne, Wiltshire, in 1814-15 as a cabinet play, describing it as "a Christmas Tale . . . in humble imitation of the Winter's Tale of Shakespeare". It was rejected by Drury Lane in 1816. The play is a chivalric romance, set in the mountains of "Illyria", where Zapolya the Illyrian Queen is deposed during a civil war, and finally restored with her son, Prince Andreas. Among her faithful supporters is the passionate Glycine, the orphan daughter of one of the mountain chiefs, splendidly described as a "sword that leap'dst forth from a bed of roses" (Act IV, scene 1). The "Song" is sung by Glycine as she climbs among the mountain crags, armed to the teeth, and looking for her lover (who will turn out to be none other than Prince Andreas, future King of Illyria). The "Song" is overheard by Queen Zapolya, hiding in a cave, and is the first glimmer of hope that her freedom-loving mountain

subjects may yet support her. So the bird "so bold" in the shaft of sunlight (3), is not merely a symbol of love but also of political hope and inspiration for the future. (The bird is evidently a skylark (5), and Coleridge's use of this romantic symbol may be compared to Shelley's "To A Skylark", 1819. Compare also Nos. 82 and 83.) Again, Coleridge catches this mood of urgency and enchantment by a deliberate fragment of pure verbal magic, ending in an almost abstract musical repetition of one rhyme-sound (11-16).

#### 89. "ARS POETICA"

First published in chapter 15 of the *Biographia Literaria* 1817; collected in J. D. Campbell's edition *Poetical Works* 1893. The quoted line in the prefatory note comes from Coleridge's own poem, "France: An Ode" (No. 95), and prepares the reader for the dynamic "coastal" imagery of the two illustrative fragments. This is one of Coleridge's most compact and lucid demonstrations of his psychological theory of the Imagination. It seems possible to prefer the plain, rather Wordsworthian first version, to the "poetic" inversions and exclamations of the second version, with its blatant reliance on the pathetic fallacy of the pine trees' "streaming" tresses of hair. However, Coleridge's "transference" of imaginative spirit has genuinely, and rather mysteriously, taken place: in the first version the pines are stoic, masculine, monk-like ("shorn and bowed"); in the second they have become terrified, "wild" and feminine. Rhythm, mood, and sexual atmosphere have all been "modified" and intensified to produce a quite different perception of the same physical landscape.

#### 90. "ARIA SPONTANEA"

First published as a note to "Youth and Age" (No. 69) in J. D. Campbell's edition *Poetical Works* 1893. In this ms., Coleridge amusingly describes how the opening verse or musical "air" of his poem "Youth and Age" came to him in a flash of inspiration one morning in September 1823. He then compares this to a much earlier memory, in 1807 or perhaps even 1797, when he was walking over the Quantock hills and met a speeding bumblebee with its "sharp and burry" sound, and then a skylark with its "Song-Fountain" of music climbing far above the horizon. These sudden, delightful dawn encounters with bee and bird are both analogies of creative inspiration, in which the "music" of a verse is unexpectedly presented like a gift of Nature's. The comic bravura of Coleridge's descriptions - the bee is compared to a dandified gentleman in a snuff-coloured waistcoat ("Rappee Spenser") with scarlet stripes - while the skylark's song is compared to a decorated Gothic column - catches him in one of the childlike moods of wonder and extravagance that never quite left him.

#### 91. "THE WORLD THAT SPIDERY WITCH"

First published in E. H. Coleridge's edition *Poetical Works* 1912. Composed on 25 February 1825 at Highgate. The prefatory letter is addressed to Coleridge's confidante Mrs Ann Gillman (see "The Garden of Boccaccio", No. 70) and continues with a draft of the sonnet "Work Without Hope" (No. 19) which has been omitted here. The physical advances or encroachments of old age are compared to the sinister, and even repulsive, cocoon of webbing which the spider spins to form its "windowless" room, with "viscuous masonry of films and thread". Light is closed off, and the senses progressively muffled and paralysed. Eventually the "dusky chamber" with its horrible "tent-like Hangings", becomes a premonition of the tomb and funeral shroud. This comparison, as with the poem "Psyche" (No. 81) is based on close botanical observation, which Coleridge uses in the emblematic style of George Herbert to describe a claustrophobic sense of spiritual solitude. The only relief is represented by a mirror or looking-glass within the room, a "Sister Mirror", which is the emblem of true friendship or "elective affinity", showing Coleridge his true self. Ann Gillman was that Sister Mirror for Coleridge - "the Alone Most Dear" (14) - but in a moment of depression he believed that her friendship was "broken". (She afterwards wrote on the ms. that Coleridge was mistaken, and it was only his "fancy".) Coleridge later published the sonnet, but abandoned the Spider poem as a fragment too obsessive and horrible to retain. Part of its power comes from the domestic neatness of the creature in its "lurking parlour or withdrawing room", which is really a relentless and implacable monster.

#### 92. "THE NETHERLANDS"

First published in E. H. Coleridge's edition *Poetical Works* 1912. Composed in summer 1828 during a nostalgic tour through the Rhineland and Holland, which Coleridge undertook with Wordsworth accompanied by his beautiful twenty-four-year-old daughter Dora Wordsworth (whom Wordsworth adored and Coleridge greatly admired). This was partly a celebrity tour - they met Schlegel and other Continental worthies - and partly a journey of reconciliation for the two old friends, facilitated by Dora's soothing presence. Coleridge made many fine Notebook entries on the Dutch and German countryside, and many rude remarks about the towns. This fragment of Dutch landscape is an almost perfect imagist poem, in a single brushstroke of observation. The ms. contains two more lines, which appear to be the false start of a second stanza, "Water, wide water, greenness and green banks . . ." The suspended, magical, innocent state of vision, in which a newborn world seems about to float off or dissolve in mist, seems as much part of Coleridge's mood as his geographic location.

## Notes to the Political, Ideological and Topical Poems

### 93. "AN ODE ON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BASTILLE"

First published *Poetical Works* 1834. Composed by the sixteen-year-old Coleridge at Christ's Hospital, after the fall of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. News of the storming of the notorious Paris prison by a crowd of citizens and militia soon spread right across Europe as a universal symbol of Liberty (stanza I). This is young Coleridge's gleeful schoolboy response, echoing a hundred similar Odes and Effusions published in newspapers and pamphlets of the time. Stanzas II and III are missing from the MS. Stanza IV imagines the sufferings of the Bastille prisoners (in fact there were only seven incarcerated at the time, but previous guests had included Voltaire and de Sade). Stanza V sees Liberty spreading down to the humblest of farm-labourers, and to new freedoms of speech and the press. Stanza VI traces the spread of Liberty in national independence movements across northern Europe, but ends on a proper note of British patriotism. It is interesting that, at this date, Coleridge expresses no expectation of an English revolution and no feeling that Britain was anything but "the freest of the free" (40). His political radicalism only began at Cambridge (see No. 8 and No. 94). The style is similarly conventional, a sub-Miltonic verse of lofty circumlocutions and personifications, which carries little but its own (rather engaging) enthusiasm.

### 94. "TO A YOUNG ASS"

First published in the *Morning Chronicle* on 30 December 1794; collected in *Poems* 1796. Composed during Coleridge's last term at Jesus College, Cambridge, and one of the first public statements of his radicalism. Inspired by the sight of an actual donkey and foal, tethered on college grounds known as Jesus Piece, the poem is a witty political protest against poverty, cleverly combining the ideas of animal philanthropy (1-4), Jacobin fraternity (19-20) and Christian brotherhood (26). The mixture of pathos and humour, in treating the foal as a fellow-member of an "oppressed race" (1), and a "meek Child of Misery" (10) given to quoting Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide (12) moves between the touching and the absurd. A private version, sent in a letter of 17 December 1794 to Southey, is more openly subversive, referring both to their Pantisocratic scheme (see No. 8) and to King George III in terms that amount to "seditious libel" (then an imprisonable offence). These alterations read: "Of high-soul'd Pantisocracy to dwell" (28); and rather wittily to end the poem (33-6):

Yea! and more musically sweet to me  
Thy dissonant harsh bray of joy would be,

Than Handel's softest airs that soothe to rest  
The tumult of a scoundrel Monarch's breast.

As a result of the poem (especially 26), Coleridge was later brilliantly ridiculed in a donkey cartoon, published by the conservative *Anti-Jacobin Magazine* (1799), and mocked by Byron as "Laureate of the long-ear'd kind". But the idea of man's essential fellowship with the animals appears frequently in Coleridge's letters of this period ("I call even my Cat sister in the Fraternity of universal Nature"), and is central to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (No. 32). Is this the first Animal Rights poem?

95. "THE PRESENT STATE OF SOCIETY"  
[EXTRACT FROM "RELIGIOUS MUSINGS"]

First published as here, with the title "The Present State of Society", in Coleridge's journal, the *Watchman*, 9 March 1796. Coleridge later expanded it to form a 419-line "desultory Poem written on the Christmas Eve of 1794" (when it was probably begun but certainly not finished), loosely entitled "Religious Musings". This was published in *Poems* 1796 and then collected in *Poetical Works* 1828.

This was the work that Coleridge disowned as "Elaborate and swelling" in his early Conversation poem to Charles Lamb (see No. 22). Bombastic, compassionate, and almost unbearable to read, it gives a clear impression of Coleridge's apocalyptic radicalism at this period, with its mixture of kindly philanthropy and millennial rant. The footnotes, ranging from Bruce's *Travels* to the *Book of Revelations*, are suggestive of later work. The final paragraph given here, which Coleridge added in the expanded text, enumerates his intellectual heroes at this date: John Milton, republican and epic poet; David Hartley, philosopher and physiologist; and Joseph Priestley, Unitarian radical and physicist (who gave an example to the Pantisocrats by emigrating to the Susquehanna region in America, when a royalist mob burnt down his house in Birmingham). Wordsworth, who had recently come back from the actual Revolution in Paris, said he particularly admired the passage describing the "massy gates of Paradise" glimpsed by "the favoured good man in his lonely walk" (86-97).

96. "INVISIBLE POWERS"  
[EXTRACT FROM "THE DESTINY OF NATIONS"]

First published as the opening section of a long political poem, "The Destiny of Nations", in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. The extract given here (with the editor's title) was originally composed as a separate fragment during the course of 1795-6, but not published at that time. Much later, Coleridge combined it with materials called "The Vision of the Maid of Orleans" (which he had originally contributed to Southey's verse drama *Joan of Arc*

in 1796), with which it has virtually no connection. Together these elements form the chaotic 470-line poem, or ragbag of political descriptions and metaphysical speculations, entitled "The Destiny of Nations". Significant further material (100-109) was added as late as 1834.

"Invisible Powers" forms a relatively coherent section within the political framework. It presents various metaphysical, theological, scientific, and anthropological speculations about the sources of power and meaning in the natural universe. A sublime Platonic version of reality (compare No. 79), is contrasted with a materialist's reductionist world, a Pantheist view, one of Newtonian atoms, or Leibnitz's monads. Coleridge insists on some kind of transcendental view of power, however primitive, which avoids total materialism or the "gloom" of nihilism and "trains up to God" (48-51). He turns to the folklore of Lapland and Greenland, and their symbolic mythologies. His descriptions of "the Giant Bird Vuokho" (81-5), and the "Good Spirit Torngarsuck" with its "malignant" underwater double (86-100, and footnote) are remarkable premonitions of the world of the "Ancient Mariner".

97. "FIRE, FAMINE, AND SLAUGHTER"

First published in the *Morning Post*, 8 January 1798; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817. Composed 1796-7 when the savage crushing of the Vendée rebellion in the north-west of France exposed the cruelty of the Revolutionary government in Paris. Coleridge compares this with the equally violent suppression of the United Irishmen's rebellion by the British government under William Pitt (46f). Pitt's name is never actually printed (63, "Letters four do form his name") which might have opened Coleridge to a charge of seditious libel. The poem is one of violent political protest, using the allegoric form of a nightmare dialogue between three Sisters (Fire, Famine and Slaughter) who are obviously inspired by the three witches in *Macbeth*. Ideologically, the poem served to establish Coleridge's liberal "left of centre" position, which is characteristic of all his journalism between 1798 and 1804, opposed to the French Revolutionary regime, but not identified with the British wartime government whose measures he regarded as repressive and reactionary. (His famous and damning newspaper profile of William Pitt was published two years later in the *Morning Post* on 19 March 1800.) In *Sibylline Leaves* 1817 Coleridge republished the War Eclogue, with a long and ingenious "Apologetic Preface", arguing that the poem had no subversive or propaganda intent against the government; that the "grotesque union of epigrammatic wit with allegoric personification" had a purely imaginative impact on the reader; and that (like Lytton Strachey in 1914) he had been prepared "to interpose his own body" to defend "Mr Pitt's person" from physical assault at that time.

98. "FRANCE: AN ODE"

First published in the *Morning Post* on 16 April 1798; re-issued in a quarto pamphlet (J. Johnson, 1798, with "Frost at Midnight" No. 27, and "Fears in Solitude", No. 28); re-published with No. 28 in the *Morning Post* on 14 October 1802; republished in the *Poetical Register* 1812; collected in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817.

The extensive publication history of this Ode indicates its significance as a public statement of Coleridge's shift from a radical, pro-French Revolutionary, Jacobin position to that of a liberal defender of "Freedom" (64) and "Liberty" (105). The original title of 1798 was "The Recantation: An Ode"; and the "Argument" was written by Coleridge for his newspaper readers in 1802. Such public "recantations" appeared all over Europe at this time, as the warlike and imperialist intentions of the French became evident with the invasion of Switzerland (in March 1798): in Germany, celebrated ones were published by Goethe, Klopstock, Schiller, Wieland and Kotzebu. It is interesting to compare Coleridge's exclamatory and rhetorical public style here (95, "Priestcraft's harpy minions"), with his more intimate treatment of the same theme in the contemporaneous "Fears in Solitude" (No. 28). Yet the poem has powerful passages (such as stanza IV); and some of Coleridge's gigantesque imagery, such as the description of the awaking figure of France (22-25), has been compared to Goya's allegorical paintings of the period.

99. "THE DEVIL'S THOUGHTS"

First published with fourteen stanzas in the *Morning Post*, 6 September 1799; collected as ten stanzas in *Poetical Works* 1828; enlarged to seventeen stanzas (as here) in *Poetical Works* 1834. This brilliant squib, in the manner of the popular "broadsheet ballads" of the mid-eighteenth century (often obscene), was originally written with Southey when Coleridge returned from Germany in autumn 1799. The first three stanzas were improvised by Southey "as he hummed in front of his shaving-mirror", and the remainder were dashed off by Coleridge over breakfast. The poem caused a sensation when it first appeared in the newspaper (unsigned), probably because it was infinitely extendable, and everyone could add their own stanzas. The humour has broadened from political to social satire: the Devil's creatures are all unpopular "rich" professions, who are exploiting the poor, the underprivileged and the credulous at a time of wartime poverty and uncertainty. They include the standard figures of the Lawyer, the Apothecary, the Bookseller (special pleading here, perhaps), the Prison Governor, the Preacher, the Politician. The Devil is finally scared back to Hell by a scarlet-faced General, in one of Coleridge's most excruciating puns (70).

The anonymous ballad soon became public property, and many subsequent versions and updatings appeared, including one by Shelley ("The Devil's Walk", 1812), another by Byron ("The Devil's Drive", 1813), and

a third purporting to come from Coleridge's old Professor of Greek at Cambridge, the drunken Richard Porson (1830). Eventually Southey thoroughly overdid the joke by expanding it to fifty-seven stanzas. The best image in the ballad, Coleridge's stanza V, directly inspired Shelley's great protest poem, "The Mask of Anarchy", 1819.

#### 100. "A CHARACTER"

First published in *Poetical Works* 1834. Probably composed in 1825-6 at Highgate, after some reflection on Hazlitt's bitter attack on his political "apostasy" (27-30) in his essay "Mr Coleridge" in *The Spirit of the Age*. (Compare Coleridge's immediate reaction in "Work Without Hope", No. 19.)

The image of himself as some kind of "bird" (1) runs right through Coleridge's letters, and many of the poems, and would perhaps reward special study. Here he is an innocent, liberal tom-tit (18) set upon by vicious, Jacobin or radical "bats" (4) who were once, like Hazlitt, his "nest-mates" and now accuse him of apostasy and money-making and wanting a knighthood (31-36). It should not be forgotten at this time that Southey was Poet Laureate, Wordsworth had a valuable government sinecure as Distributor of Stamps, while Coleridge was dependent on scattered literary fees and charity from the Royal Society of Authors, and reduced to living in a two-room apartment in James Gillman's house (77-89).

The humorous treatment of this deadly, personal theme contains some sly rejoinders, such as the disguised attack on Wordsworth, for whom he "plough'd and sow'd, while others reap" (42-6); and Hazlitt's radical chic journalism and flaunting with "doctrines Jacobinical" (47-52). Yet the nimble, bouncy wit does not entirely disguise Coleridge's special pleading for himself, as the honourable, penniless, "poor Bird . . . poor Bard" who had followed his conscience in a world of cowards, bloodsuckers, and cynics. "Phoebus" (16), like Apollo, is the sun god of the poets. "Sir Joseph Jay" (36) is a composite name referring to various knighthoods distributed among his successful contemporaries, like Joseph Banks, James Mackintosh, and Humphry Davy. "Pitt been Fox" (56): they had been respectively Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. "Goose and Goody" (64) are the foolish Prince Regent and his Prime Minister, Lord Grey. "Punic Greek" (72-3, see note to "Epitaph", No. 23).

#### 101. "THE DELINQUENT TRAVELLERS"

First published by E. H. Coleridge in *Poetical Works* 1912. This delightful and unexpected late *jeu d'esprit* of the ageing Coleridge was probably started during one of his autumn holidays with the Gillmans at Ramsgate (82), which took place regularly between 1820 and 1830. An undated draft exists



in a ms. given to his last amanuensis and literary executor, the surgeon J. H. Green. The reference to Captain Lyon's *Private Journal* (1824) of his voyage with the polar explorer Sir William Parry (3), suggests a date around 1824-5; while the descriptions of Boulogne and its exiles (92-9) suggests a much later date, after Coleridge and Wordsworth had made their own last voyage to the Continent in summer 1828 (see "The Netherlands", No. 92).

Coleridge's wry evocations of the modern mania for travel by every possible means of transport, including steamship and gas-balloon (16-21), makes a surprising, humorous coda to the great, strange voyage of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Coleridge identifies not with the comfortable fashionable tourists, but with the "delinquent" travellers - bankrupts, criminals, cashiered soldiers, smugglers, exiles, emigrants, all "who go because they cannot stay" (65-77). Coleridge finally sees himself as embarking on yet one last fantasy voyage southwards: to Australia, the land of the "black swan and kangaroo", where he will found a new dynasty of pineapples and pantisocrats (102-19). "Pegasus" (63) is the mythological winged horse, symbol both of travel and artistic inspiration (see note to "A Tombless Epitaph", No. 62)