

Modern Critical Views

SAMUEL TAYLOR
COLERIDGE

Edited and with an introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM



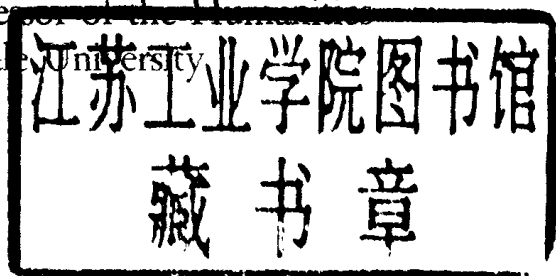
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Edited and with an introduction by

Harold Bloom

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Editor's Note

This book brings together a comprehensive selection of the most distinguished criticism devoted to Coleridge's writings during the past quarter century, arranged in the order of its publication. I am grateful to Cathy Caruth for her erudition and insight in helping me choose these critical essays.

The introduction surveys Coleridge's poetic career as a powerful instance of the anxiety of influence. With my earlier readings of "Dejection: An Ode," "To William Wordsworth," "Limbo," and "Ne Plus Ultra," the chronological sequence of this volume begins, to be followed directly by Kenneth Burke's exuberant response to "Kubla Khan."

Owen Barfield, who among all living critics is closest in spirit to Coleridge, integrates some critical aspects of Coleridge's quest for "Method." Related inquiries are carried out by M. H. Abrams, dean of Romantic scholars, in his account of Coleridge's grand conceptual image, "A Light in Sound," and by a great allegorical critic, Angus Fletcher, in his analysis of Coleridgean threshold personifications. E. S. Shaffer's profoundly learned excavation of the origins of "Kubla Khan" in Coleridge's abandoned vision of a projected epic on the fall of Jerusalem is joined here by Kathleen Coburn's unique insight into the cognitive art of Coleridge's extraordinary Notebooks. Two great generations of Coleridge scholars culminate in Thomas McFarland's discovery of the origin of the poet-critic's theory of Secondary Imagination in the philosophy of the German metaphysician, Tetens.

A younger generation of scholars is represented by the seven remaining essays in this volume, starting with Jerome Christensen's examination of the mode of marginalia in the *Biographia Literaria*. Leslie Brisman's dialectical account of Coleridge's Christian supernaturalism partly turns upon Coleridge's own antithesis that is also at the center of Timothy Corrigan's investigation of the language of science in the *Biographia Literaria*.

Four readings of Coleridge's most famous poems conclude this volume, with each reading exemplifying a distinguished instance of contemporary modes of advanced literary criticism. Arden Reed on "Frost at Midnight" and Susan J. Wolfson on "The Ancient Mariner" both show a deconstructive awareness in analyzing problematical elements in Coleridge's rhetoric. Ken Frieden's exegesis of "Kubla Khan" and Camille Paglia's overview of "Christabel" combine psychoanalytical and rhetorical perspectives so as to achieve startling yet central insights into Coleridge at his most magical, and at his most disturbing.

Contents

Editor's Note	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Harold Bloom</i>	
Wisdom and Dejection: Four Poems	19
<i>Harold Bloom</i>	
"Kubla Khan": Proto-Surrealist Poem	33
<i>Kenneth Burke</i>	
Ideas, Method, Laws	53
<i>Owen Barfield</i>	
Coleridge's "A Light in Sound"	67
<i>M. H. Abrams</i>	
"Positive Negation"	89
<i>Angus Fletcher</i>	
The Oriental Idyll	93
<i>E. S. Shaffer</i>	
Experience into Thought	109
<i>Kathleen Coburn</i>	
The Origin and Significance of Coleridge's Theory of Secondary Imagination	117
<i>Thomas McFarland</i>	
The Marginal Method of the <i>Biographia Literaria</i>	139
<i>Jerome Christensen</i>	
Coleridge and the Supernatural	149
<i>Leslie Brisman</i>	

The <i>Biographia Literaria</i> and the Language of Science <i>Timothy Corrigan</i>	167
"Frost at Midnight" <i>Arden Reed</i>	191
The Language of Interpretation <i>Susan J. Wolfson</i>	201
Conversational Pretense in "Kubla Khan" <i>Ken Frieden</i>	209
"Christabel" <i>Camille Paglia</i>	217
Chronology	231
Contributors	235
Bibliography	237
Acknowledgments	241
Index	243

Introduction

I

Coleridge, the youngest of fourteen children of a country clergyman, was a precocious and lonely child, a kind of changeling in his own family. Early a dreamer and (as he said) a “character,” he suffered the loss of his father (who had loved him best of all the children) when he was only nine. At Christ’s Hospital in London, soon after his father’s death, he found an excellent school that gave him the intellectual nurture he needed, as well as a lifelong friend in the future essayist Charles Lamb. Early a poet, he fell deeply in love with Mary Evans, a schoolfellow’s sister, but sorrowfully nothing came of it.

At Jesus College, Cambridge, Coleridge started well, but temperamentally he was not suited to academic discipline and failed of distinction. Fleeing Cambridge, and much in debt, he enlisted in the cavalry under the immortal name of Silas Tomkyn Comberback but kept falling off his horse. Though he proved useful to his fellow dragoons at writing love letters, he was good for little else but stable-cleaning, and the cavalry allowed his brothers to buy him out. He returned to Cambridge, but his characteristic guilt impeded academic labor and when he abandoned Cambridge in 1794 he had no degree.

A penniless young poet, radical in politics, original in religion, he fell in with the then equally radical bard Robert Southey, remembered today as the Conservative Laureate constantly savaged in Byron’s satirical verse. Like our contemporary communards, the two poetical youths projected what they named a “pantisocracy.” With the right young ladies and, hopefully, other choice spirits, they would found a communistic agrarian-literary settlement on the banks of the Susquehanna in exotic Pennsylvania. At Southey’s urging, Coleridge made a pantisocratic engagement to the not very brilliant Miss Sara Fricker, whose sister Southey was to marry. Pantisocracy died aborning, and Coleridge in time woke up miserably to find himself unsuitably married, the greatest misfortune of his life.

He turned to Wordsworth, whom he had met early in 1795. His poetry

influenced Wordsworth's and helped the latter attain his characteristic mode. It is not too much to say that Coleridge's poetry disappeared into Wordsworth's. We remember *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) as Wordsworth's book, yet about a third of it (in length) was Coleridge's, and "Tintern Abbey," the crown of the volume except for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," is immensely indebted to Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight." Nor is there much evidence of Wordsworth admiring or encouraging his friend's poetry; toward "The Ancient Mariner" he was always very grudging, and he was discomfited (but inevitably so) by both "Dejection: An Ode" and "To William Wordsworth." Selfless where Wordsworth's poetry was concerned, Coleridge had to suffer his closest friend's neglect of his own poetic ambitions.

This is not an easy matter to be fair about, since literature necessarily is as much a matter of personality as it is of character. Coleridge, like Keats (and to certain readers, Shelley), is lovable. Byron is at least always fascinating, and Blake in his lonely magnificence is a hero of the imagination. But Wordsworth's personality, like Milton's or Dante's, does not stimulate affection for the poet in the common reader. Coleridge has, as Walter Pater observed, a "peculiar charm"; he seems to lend himself to myths of failure, which is astonishing when the totality of his work is contemplated.

Yet it is his life, and his self-abandonment of his poetic ambitions, that continue to convince us that we ought to find in him parables of the failure of genius. His best poetry was all written in the year and half in which he saw Wordsworth daily (1797-8), yet even his best poetry, with the single exception of "The Ancient Mariner," is fragmentary. The pattern of his life is fragmentary also. When he received an annuity from the Wedgwoods, he left Wordsworth and Dorothy to study language and philosophy in Germany (1798-9). Soon after returning, his miserable middle years began, though he was only twenty-seven. He moved near the Wordsworths again and fell in love, permanently and unhappily, with Sara Hutchinson, whose sister Mary was to become Wordsworth's wife in 1802. His own marriage was hopeless, and his health rapidly deteriorated, perhaps for psychological reasons. To help endure the pain he began to drink laudanum, liquid opium, and thus contracted an addiction he never entirely cast off. In 1804, seeking better health, he went to Malta but returned two years later in the worst condition of his life. Separating from Mrs. Coleridge, he moved to London and began another career as lecturer, general man-of-letters, and periodical editor, while his miseries augmented. The inevitable quarrel with Wordsworth in 1810 was ostensibly reconciled in 1812, but real friendship was not reestablished until 1828.

From 1816 on, Coleridge lived in the household of a physician, James

Gillman, so as to be able to keep working and thus avoid total breakdown. Prematurely aged, his poetry period over, Coleridge entered into a major last phase as critic and philosopher, upon which his historical importance depends; but this, like his earlier prose achievements, is beyond the scope of an introduction to his poetry. It remains to ask, What was his achievement as a poet, and extraordinary as that was, why did his poetry effectively cease after about 1807? Wordsworth went on with poetry after 1807 but mostly very badly. The few poems Coleridge wrote, from the age of thirty-five on, are powerful but occasional. Did the poetic will not fail in him, since his imaginative powers did not?

Coleridge's large poetic ambitions included the writing of a philosophic epic on the origin of evil and a sequence of hymns to the sun, moon, and elements. These high plans died, slowly but definitively, and were replaced by the dream of a philosophic *Opus Maximum*, a huge work of synthesis that would reconcile German idealist philosophy with the orthodox truths of Christianity. Though only fragments of this work were ever written, much was done in its place—speculations on theology, political theory, and criticism that were to influence profoundly conservative British thought in the Victorian period and, in quite another way, the American transcendentalism led by Emerson and Theodore Parker.

Coleridge's actual achievement as poet divides into two remarkably diverse groupings—remarkable because they are almost simultaneous. The daemonic group, necessarily more famous, is the triad of "The Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan." The "conversational" group includes the conversation-poem proper, of which "The Eolian Harp" and "Frost at Midnight" are the most important, as well as the irregular ode, such as "Dejection" and "To William Wordsworth." The late fragments, "Limbo" and "Ne Plus Ultra," are a kind of return to the daemonic mode. For a poet of Coleridge's gifts, to have written only nine poems that really matter is a sorrow, but the uniqueness of the two groups partly compensates for the slenderness of the canon.

The daemonic poems break through the orthodox censor set up by Coleridge's moral fears of his own imaginative impulses. Unifying the group is a magical quest-pattern which intends as its goal a reconciliation between the poet's self-consciousness and a higher order of being, associated with Divine forgiveness; but this reconciliation fortunately lies beyond the border of all these poems. The Mariner attains a state of purgation but cannot get beyond that process. Christabel is violated by Geraldine, but this too is a purgation rather than a damnation, as her utter innocence is her only flaw. Coleridge himself, in the most piercing moment in his poetry, is tempted to assume the

state of an Apollo-rebirth—the youth with flashing eyes and floating hair—but he withdraws from his vision of a poet's paradise, judging it to be only another purgatory.

The conversational group, though so immensely different in mode, speaks more directly of an allied theme: the desire to go home, not to the past but to what Hart Crane beautifully called “an improved infancy.” Each of these poems, like the daemonic group, verges upon a kind of vicarious and purgatorial atonement in which Coleridge must fail or suffer so that someone he loves may succeed or experience joy. There is a subdued implication that somehow the poet will yet be accepted into a true home this side of the grave if he can achieve an atonement.

Where Wordsworth, in his primordial power, masters the subjective world and aids his readers in the difficult art of feeling, Coleridge deliberately courts defeat by subjectivity and is content to be confessional. But though he cannot help us to feel, as Wordsworth does, he gives us to understand how deeply felt his own sense of reality is. Though in a way his poetry is a testament of defeat, a yielding to the anxiety of influence and to the fear of self-glorification, it is one of the most enduringly poignant of such testaments that literature affords us.

II

“Psychologically,” Coleridge observed, “consciousness is the problem”; and he added somberly: “Almost all is yet to be achieved.” How much he achieved Kathleen Coburn and others are showing us. My concern here is the sadder one of speculating yet again about why he did not achieve more as a poet. Walter Jackson Bate has meditated, persuasively and recently, upon Coleridge's human and literary anxieties, particularly in regard to the burden of the past and its inhibiting poetic splendors. I swerve away from Bate to center the critical meditation upon what might be called the poetics of anxiety, the process of misprision by which any latecomer strong poet attempts to clear an imaginative space for himself.

Coleridge could have been a strong poet, as strong as Blake or Wordsworth. He could have been another mighty antagonist for the Great Spectre Milton to engage and, yes, to overcome, but not without contests as titanic as those provided by Blake's *The Four Zoas* and Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, and parental victories as equivocal as those achieved with Blake's *Jerusalem* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. But we have no such poems by Coleridge. When my path winds home at the end of this Introduction, I will speculate as to what these poems should have been. As critical fathers for my quest I invoke first Oscar Wilde,

with his glorious principle that the highest criticism sees the object as in itself it really is not, and second, Wilde's critical father, Walter Pater, whose essay of 1866 on "Coleridge's Writings" seems to me still the best short treatment of Coleridge, and this after a century of commentary. Pater, who knew his debt to Coleridge, knew also the anxiety Coleridge caused him, and Pater therefore came to a further and subtler knowing. In the Organic analogue, against which the entire soul of the great Epicurean critic rebelled, Pater recognized the product of Coleridge's profound anxieties as a creator. I begin therefore with Pater on Coleridge, and then will move immediately deep into the Coleridgean interior, to look upon Coleridge's fierce refusal to take on the ferocity of the strong poet.

This ferocity, as both Coleridge and Pater well knew, expresses itself as a near-solipsism, and Egotistical Sublime, or Miltonic godlike stance. From 1795 on, Coleridge knew, loved, envied, was both cheered and darkened by the largest instance of that Sublime since Milton himself. He studied constantly, almost involuntarily, the glories of the truly modern strong poet, Wordsworth. Whether he gave Wordsworth rather more than he received, we cannot be certain; we know only that he wanted more from Wordsworth than he received, but then it was his endearing though exasperating weakness that he always needed more love than he could get, no matter how much he got: "To be beloved is all I need,/And whom I love, I love indeed."

Pater understood what he called Coleridge's "peculiar charm," but he resisted it in the sacred name of what he called the "relative" spirit against Coleridge's archaizing "absolute" spirit. In gracious but equivocal tribute to Coleridge he observed:

The literary life of Coleridge was a disinterested struggle against the application of the relative spirit to moral and religious questions. Everywhere he is restlessly scheming to apprehend the absolute; to affirm it effectively; to get it acknowledged. Coleridge failed in that attempt, happily even for him, for it was a struggle against the increasing life of the mind itself. . . . How did his choice of a controversial interest, his determination to affirm the absolute, weaken or modify his poetic gift?

To affirm the absolute, Pater says—or, as we might say, to reject all dualisms except those sanctioned by orthodox Christian thought—is not *materia poetica* for the start of the nineteenth century, and if we think of a poem like the "Hymn before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni," we are likely to agree with Pater. We will agree also when he contrasts Wordsworth favorably with Coleridge, and even with Goethe, commending Wordsworth for "that flawless

temperament . . . which keeps his conviction of a latent intelligence in nature within the limits of sentiment or instinct, and confines it to those delicate and subdued shades of expression which perfect art allows." Pater goes on to say that Coleridge's version of Wordsworth's instinct is a philosophical idea, which means that Coleridge's poetry had to be "more dramatic, more self-conscious" than Wordsworth's. But this in turn, Pater insists, means that for aesthetic success ideas must be held loosely, in the relative spirit. One idea that Coleridge did not hold loosely was the Organic analogue, and it becomes clearer as we proceed in Pater's essay that the aesthetic critic is building toward a passionate assault upon the Organic principle. He quotes Coleridge's description of Shakespeare as "a nature humanized, a genial understanding, directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness." "There," Pater comments, with bitter eloquence, "'the absolute' has been affirmed in the sphere of art; and thought begins to congeal." With great dignity Pater adds that Coleridge has "obscured the true interest of art." By likening the work of art to a living organism, Coleridge does justice to the impression the work may give us, but he "does not express the process by which that work was produced."

M. H. Abrams, in his *The Mirror and the Lamp*, defends Coleridge against Pater by insisting that Coleridge knew his central problem "was to use analogy with organic growth to account for the spontaneous, the inspired, and the self-evolving in the psychology of invention, yet not to commit himself as far to the elected figure as to minimize the supervention of the antithetic qualities of foresight and choice." Though Abrams calls Pater "short-sighted," I am afraid the critical palms remain with the relative spirit, for Pater's point was not that Coleridge had no awareness of the dangers of using the Organic analogue but rather that awareness, here as elsewhere, was no salvation for Coleridge. The issue is whether Coleridge, not Shakespeare, was able to direct "self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness." Pater's complaint is valid because Coleridge, in describing Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, keeps repeating his absolute formula that poems grow from within themselves, that their "wholeness is not in vision or conception, but in an inner feeling of totality and absolute being." As Pater says, "that exaggerated inwardness is barren" because it "withdraws us too far from what we can see, hear, and feel," because it cheats the senses and emotions of their triumph. I urge Pater's wisdom here not only against Coleridge, though I share Pater's love for Coleridge, but against the formalist criticism that continued in Coleridge's absolute spirit.

What is the imaginative source of Coleridge's disabling hunger for the Absolute? On August 9, 1831, about three years before he died, he wrote in his Notebook: "From my earliest recollection I have had a consciousness

of Power without Strength—a perception, an experience, of more than ordinary power with an inward sense of Weakness. . . . More than ever do I feel this now, when all my fancies still in their integrity are, as it were, drawn *inward* and by their suppression and compression rendered a mock substitute for Strength—” Here again is Pater’s barren and exaggerated inwardness, but in a darker context than the Organic principle provided.

This context is Milton’s “universe of death,” where Coleridge apprehended death-in-life as being “the wretchedness of *division*.” If we stand in that universe, then “we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to life.” To be so separated is to become, Coleridge says, “a soul-less fixed star, receiving no rays nor influences into my Being, *a Solitude which I so tremble at, that I cannot attribute it even to the Divine Nature.*” This, we can say, is Coleridge’s Counter-Sublime, his answer to the anxiety of influence, in strong poets. The fear of solipsism is greater in him than the fear of not individuating his own imagination.

As with every other major Romantic, the prime precursor poet for Coleridge was Milton. There is a proviso to be entered here; for all these poets—Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge (only Keats is an exception)—there is a greater Sublime poetry behind Milton, but as its author is a people and not a single poet, and as it is far removed in time, its greatness does not inhibit a new imagination—not unless it is taken as the work of the Prime Precursor Himself, to whom all creation belongs. Only Coleridge, among these poets, acquired a double Sublime anxiety of influence. Beyond the beauty that has terror in it of Milton, was beauty more terrible. In a letter to Thelwall, December 17, 1796, Coleridge wrote: “Is not Milton a *sublimier* poet than Homer or Virgil? Are not his Personages more sublimely clothed? And do you not know, that there is not perhaps *one* page in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in which he has not borrowed his imagery from the *Scriptures*?—I allow, and rejoice that *Christ* appealed only to the understanding & the affections; but I affirm that, after reading Isaiah, or St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer & Virgil are disgustingly *tame* to me, & Milton himself barely tolerable.” Yet these statements are rare in Coleridge. Frequently, Milton seems to blend with the ultimate influence, which I think is a normal enough procedure. In 1796, Coleridge also says, in his review of Burke’s *Letter to a Noble Lord*: “It is lucky for poetry, that Milton did not live in our days. . . .” Here Coleridge moves toward the center of his concern, and we should remember his formula: “Shakespeare was all men, potentially, except Milton.” This leads to a more ambiguous formula, reported to us of a lecture that Coleridge gave on November 28, 1811: “Shakespeare became all things well into which he infused himself, while all forms, all things became Milton—the poet ever present to our minds and more

than gratifying us for the loss of the distinct individuality of what he represents." Though Coleridge truly professes himself more than gratified, he admits loss. Milton's greatness is purchased at the cost of something dear to Coleridge, a principle of difference he knows may be flooded out by his monistic yearnings. For Milton, to Coleridge, is a mythic monad in himself. Commenting upon the apostrophe to light at the commencement of the third book of *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge notes: "In all modern poetry in Christendom there is an under consciousness of a sinful nature, a fleeting away of external things, the mind or subject greater than the object, the reflective character predominant. In the *Paradise Lost* the sublimest parts are the revelations of Milton's own mind, producing itself and evolving its own greatness; and this is truly so, that when that which is merely entertaining for its objective beauty is introduced, it at first seems a discord." This might be summarized as: where Milton is not, nature is barren, and its significance is that Milton is permitted just such a solitude as Coleridge trembles to imagine for the Divine Being.

Humphry House observed that "Coleridge was quite unbelievably modest about his own poems; and the modesty was of a curious kind, sometimes rather humble and over-elaborate." As House adds, Coleridge "dreaded publication" of his poetry, and until 1828, when he was fifty-six, there was nothing like an adequate gathering of his verse. Wordsworth's attitude was no help, of course, and the Hutchinson girls and Dorothy no doubt followed Wordsworth in his judgments. There was Wordsworth, and before him there had been Milton. Coleridge presumably knew what "Tintern Abbey" owed to "Frost at Midnight," but this knowledge nowhere found expression. Must we resort to psychological speculation in order to see what inhibited Coleridge, or are there more reliable aids available?

In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge is not very kind to his pre-Wordsworthian poetry, particularly to the "Religious Musings." Yet this is where we must seek what went wrong with Coleridge's ambitions—here, and if there were space, in "The Destiny of Nations" fragments (not its arbitrarily yoked-together form of 1817), and in the "Ode to the Departing Year," and in the "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" in its earlier versions. After Wordsworth had descended upon Coleridge, supposedly as a "know-thyself" admonition from heaven but really rather more like a new form of the Miltonic blight, then Coleridge's poetic ambitions sustained another kind of inhibition. The Miltonic shadow on early Coleridge needs to be studied first, before a view can be obtained of his maturer struggles with influence.

With characteristic self-destructiveness, Coleridge gave "Religious Musings" the definitive subtitle: "A Desultory Poem, Written on the Christmas Eve of 1794." The root-meaning of "desultory" is "vaulting," and though Coleridge

consciously meant that his poem skipped about and wavered, his imagination meant "vaulting," for "Religious Musings" is a wildly ambitious poem. "This is the time . . ." it begins, in direct recall of Milton's "Nativity" Hymn, yet it follows not the Hymn but the most sublime moments of *Paradise Lost*, particularly the invocation to Book III. As with the 1802 "Hymn before Sunrise," its great fault as a poem is that it never stops whooping; in its final version I count well over one hundred exclamation points in just over four hundred lines. Whether one finds this habit in Coleridge distressing or endearing hardly matters; he just never could stop doing it. He whoops because he vaults; he is a high jumper of the Sublime, and psychologically he could not avoid this. I quote the poem's final passage with relish and with puzzlement, for I am uncertain as to how good it may be, though it seems awful. Yet its awfulness is at least Sublime; it is not the drab, flat awfulness of Wordsworth at *his* common worst in *The Excursion* or even (heresy to admit this!) in so many passages of *The Prelude*—passages that we hastily skip by, feeling zeal and relief in getting at the great moments. Having just shouted out his odd version of Berkeley—that "life is a vision shadowy of truth"—Coleridge sees "the veiling clouds retire" and God appears in a blaze upon His Throne. Raised to a pitch of delirium by this vision, Coleridge soars aloft to join it:

Contemplant Spirits! ye that hover o'er
 With untired gaze the immeasurable fount
 Ebullient with Creative Deity!
 And ye of plastic power, that interfused
 Roll through the grosser and material mass
 In organizing surge! Holies of God!
 (And what if Monads of the infinite mind?)
 I haply journeying my immortal course
 Shall sometime join your mystic choir! Till then
 I discipline my young and novice thought
 In ministeries of heart-stirring song,
 And aye on Meditation's heaven-ward wing
 Soaring aloft I breathe the empyreal air
 Of Love, omnific, omnipresent Love,
 Whose day-spring rises glorious in my soul
 As the great Sun, when he his influence
 Sheds on the frost-bound waters—The glad stream
 Flows to the ray and warbles as it flows.

Scholars agree that this not terribly pellucid passage somehow combines an early Unitarianism with a later orthodox overlay, as well as quantities of

Berkeley, Hartley, Newton, Neoplatonism, and possibly more esoteric matter. A mere reader will primarily be reminded of Milton and will be in the right, for Milton counts here and the rest do not. The Spirits Coleridge invokes are Miltonic angels, though their functions seem to be more complicated. Coleridge confidently assures himself and us that his course is immortal, that he may end up as a Miltonic angel and so perhaps also as a monad of the infinite mind. In the meantime, he will study Milton's "heart-stirring song." Otherwise, all he needs is love, which is literally the air he breathes, the sunrise radiating out of his soul in a stream of song, and the natural sun toward which he flows, a sun that is not distinct from God. If we reflect on how palpably sincere this is, how wholehearted, and consider what was to be Coleridge's actual poetic course, we will be moved. Moved to what? Well, perhaps to remember a remark of Coleridge's: "There are many men, especially at the outset of life, who, in their too eager desire for the end, overlook the difficulties in the way; there is another class, who see nothing else. The first class *may* sometimes fail; the latter rarely succeed." Whatever the truth of this for other men, no poet becomes a strong poet unless he starts out with a certain obliviousness of the difficulties in the way. He will soon enough meet those difficulties, however, and one of them will be that his precursor and inspirer threatens to subsume him, as Coleridge is subsumed by Milton in "Religious Musings" and in his other pre-Wordsworthian poems. And here I shall digress massively before returning to Coleridge's poetry, for my discourse enters now upon the enchanted and baleful ground of poetic influence, through which I am learning to find my way by a singular light—one that will bear a little explanation.

I do not believe that poetic influence is simply something that happens, that it is just the process by which ideas and images are transmitted from earlier to later poets. In that view, whether or not influence causes anxiety in the later poet is a matter of temperament and circumstance. Poetic influence thus reduces to source-study, of the kind performed upon Coleridge by Lowes and later scholars. Coleridge was properly scornful of such study, and I think most critics learn how barren an enterprise it turns out to be. I myself have no use for it as such, and what I mean by the study of poetic influence turns source-study inside out. The first principle of the proper study of poetic influence, as I conceive it, is that no strong poem has sources and no strong poem merely alludes to another poem. The meaning of a strong poem is another strong poem, a precursor's poem which is being misinterpreted, revised, corrected, evaded, twisted askew, made to suffer an inclination or bias which is the property of the later and not the earlier poet. Poetic influence, in this