

# Airy Dreams of Father and Daughter

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**B**OTH COLERIDGE AND HIS DAUGHTER SARA had visions of an ideal “home” that proved not to be transferable to the situations in which they found themselves living. Rather than compromise, they adhered to these ideals and I shall try to show that, in an oblique way, they perhaps reached them (even though posthumously in one case) through the fact of Sara’s editing her father’s work.

The recent Coleridge Bulletin with its splendid cover was most timely, containing as it did Peter Swaab’s summer conference paper on Sara Coleridge and a flier for his recent edition of her *Collected Poems*. I had already heard the lecture and bought the book, and had found them both full of interest. He has read through her manuscripts in Texas, and I am very gratefully making use of all that hard work, as well as the biography *A Victorian Daughter* by Bradford Keyes Mudge, and the *Memoir & Letters* collected by her own daughter in 1873 (SCML).

The “airy dreams” of my title is taken from a poem by Sara Coleridge that I shall return to later; but I shall begin with the Epigraph to another of her poems, which links the idea of home with self and dreams.

However dreams may be fallacious concerning outward events, yet may they be truly significant at home: and consolations or discouragements may be drawn from dreams which intimately tell us ourselves.

Sir Thomas Browne (Swaab 162)

The thought here is about dreams during sleep rather than the “airy dreams” of my title, but the quotation is made more interesting by Swaab’s note:

The epigraph from Browne does not show up in the electronic searches of his work, and may perhaps be a pastiche of Browne by STC.

(Swaab 228)

Intrigued, I went to look in the Marginalia. Not surprisingly, I did not find the epigraph quotation, but I found other interesting additions. In 1802 Coleridge acquired his own *Religio Medici*, now in the John Rylands Library, and at some point wrote in the margin, “I have never read a book, in which I felt a greater similarity to my own *make* of mind—active in enquiry, & yet with an appetite to believe,—in short, an affectionate & elevated *Visionary*!” (M I 758) New York Public Library also has a copy of Browne’s *Works* that belonged to Coleridge, and the fly leaf is inscribed by three hands. At the top: “C Lamb March 9<sup>th</sup> 1804 bought for S T Coleridge”; below this Coleridge has written: “NB. It was on the 10<sup>th</sup> on which day I dined & punched at Lamb’s—& exulted in the having procured the *Hydrotaphia*, & all the rest *lucro posito*. S.T.C.” Squeezed in between, in Sara Hutchinson’s hand: “Given to S Hutchinson March 1804.” (M I 760)

Coleridge valued this volume both for its contents and its connections, shown in that conjunction of three sets of handwriting—his own, his dear friend of longest standing, Charles Lamb, and the woman he loved, Sara Hutchinson. Browne's distinction between love and friendship has long annotations. Against Browne's statement, "I never yet cast a true affection on a woman, but I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, my God." Coleridge adds,

So have I loved *one* Woman; and I believe that such a love of such a Woman is the highest Friendship—for we cannot love a Friend as a Woman, but we can love a Woman as a Friend. (M I 751)

And he continues on a sheet of paper written on both sides, and pasted by one corner to the top of the page:

Friendship satisfies the *highest* parts of our nature; but a wife, who is capable of friendship, satisfies *all*. The great business of real unostentatious Virtue is—not to eradicate any real genuine instinct or appetite of human nature; but—to establish a concord and unity betwixt all parts of our nature, to give a feeling & a Passion to our purer Intellect, and to intellectualize our feelings and passions. This a happy marriage, blessed with children, effectuates, in the highest degree, of which our nature is capable, & is therefore chosen by St Paul, as the symbol of the Union of the Church with Christ; that is, of the Souls of all good Men with God, the soul of the Universe. (M I 751)

This ideal picture of married love had an early simple expression in the words of Adelaide in *The Fall of Robespierre*, later printed separately under the title *Domestic Peace*.

Tell me, on what holy ground  
May DOMESTIC PEACE be found?...  
In a cottaged vale She dwells  
Listening to the Sabbath bells!

(PW 66 1-2, 7-8)

This describes quite well Coleridge's first home as a husband in Nether Stowey among a group of friends, a kind of fluid mini-pantisocracy, where he could centre his creative energies from within a domestic security. His life was beginning to gather into the unity of experience that he was searching for; however, the rallying cry for action that had marked the end of the six-week honeymoon in Clevedon, "the bloodless fight/Of Science, Freedom, and the Truth in Christ" (*Reflections on having left a place of Retirement*), is an indication that his strong sense of social duty would always make life unsettling, for himself and others. It accounts, for example, for his ongoing desire for Wordsworth to write *The Recluse*:

I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary philosophes.

(CL I 527)

Political and social ideals don't have to disappear when you get married in your early twenties, but you have to learn that domestic peace with a wife and child and no immediate income is more complicated than listening to Sabbath bells. Of course Coleridge understood this—"O Thomas Poole! If you did but know what a Father & Husband must feel, who toils with his brain for uncertain bread!" (CL I 275) But was Coleridge unusually inexperienced in the physical and emotional needs of young women? He was the youngest of ten—so a child of relatively elderly parents—and he left home for the all-male Christ's Hospital environment when he was 9 and his only sister was 13. (He remembers her in *Frost at Midnight* "when we were dressed alike"—a little boy's picture.) As he wrote later in his poem to his brother George, he was "too soon transplanted, ere my soul had fix'd/Its first domestic loves". (PW 150 18-19). So, at a time when bodily functions and ill health must have been far more obtrusive than they are now, he would not have had the opportunity to experience the birth of a younger sibling, or the different behaviour of sisters and their friends. His only sister died before he finally left Christ's Hospital and this loss probably underlies Coleridge's later envy of William's relationship with Dorothy. He wrote to Lamb:

I too a Sister *had* an only Sister...  
On her soft Bosom I repos'd my Cares...  
To her I pour'd forth all my puny Sorrows,  
(As a sick Patient in his Nurse's arms.) (PW 170 12-13)

It has been well documented that he connected a woman's love with being nursed, perhaps the most direct example coming later in the *Verse Letter to Sara Hutchinson*:

... my coarse domestic Life has known  
No Habits of heart-nursing Sympathy (CL II 796)

He, also, looked after others in sickness—for example, the enforced, but successful nursing of a fellow dragoon with smallpox at Henley, tending Charles Lloyd at Nether Stowey through nights of "agonizing delirium" and sitting up with Robert Lovell as he died of fever. Illness encouraged tender emotions. When Sara had a threatened miscarriage while pregnant with Hartley, however, he was very disturbed by the event:

I think the subject of Pregnancy the most obscure of all God's dispensations—it seems coercive against Immaterialism—it starts uneasy doubts respecting Immortality, and the pangs which the Woman suffers, seem inexplicable in the system of optimism—Other pains are only friendly admonitions that we are not acting as Nature requires—but here are pains most horrible in consequence of having obeyed Nature.

(CL I 112)

When Browne wrote that he “could be content that we might procreate like trees without... this trivial and vulgar way of coition”, Coleridge summarises his disagreement by asking in the margin, “Are there not thoughts, & affections, & Hopes, & a *Religion* of the Heart,— that lift & sanctify all our bodily Actions where the union of the bodies is but a language & a *conversation* of united Souls?” (M I 753) He has turned the charge of being “trivial and vulgar” back to Browne, but he has not laid to rest his own “uneasy doubts”.

He was away in Birmingham when Hartley was born and Sara apparently delivered herself, the nurse arriving in time to take the afterbirth away. As a wife and mother, she was proving to be practical and resilient; and Coleridge began to relish making a home as husband and father in their cottage retreat. Reading about his time in Germany, I can't help thinking sometimes “If only...” Absence shielded him from seeing and sharing directly in Sara's distress at the death of Berkeley. His long letters to her suggest deep sympathy, but not the consolation and definite plans for his return that she must have been longing for.

In writing to Poole on the delicate subject of his wish to live near the Wordsworths on his return, he mentions one important and relevant difference between William and himself: “My many weaknesses are of some advantage to me; they unite me more with the great mass of my fellow-beings—but dear Wordsworth appears to me to have hurtfully segregated & isolated his Being.” (CL I 491). This is designed for Poole's reading, but it also shows that Coleridge was beginning to recognise that Wordsworth could draw strength from solitude. He felt differently. Without discussion, “I become restless; for my nature is very social” (CN II 2322). He also understood that the North of England might be too distant for his wife, and wrote of the “impropriety of taking Mrs Coleridge to a place where she would have no acquaintance.” (CL I 490)

The homecoming in July 1799 was indeed difficult: the cottage flooded, Coleridge caught pneumonia and Hartley had scabies. Later that year, they settled in Buckingham Street in London for ten weeks and perhaps all might have been well, with Coleridge writing for the *Morning Post*, attending Humphrey Davy's lectures at the Royal Institute and Sara getting pregnant again; but during these weeks, too, he went north to revisit the Wordsworths, was overwhelmed by the grandeur of the Lake District, and met another family with daughters, the Hutchinsons. He later referred to November 24 1799 as

the date when he first fell in love with Asra. (CN I 1575) It was becoming clear that his wife was not the friend who could satisfy all aspects of his richly turbulent personality. He wrote in Latin to Southey that he had often been unhappy in his marriage, that Sara was a good mother but did not understand his nature and that they could never be completely happy together. (CL I 571) By implication he was echoing the words of the letter he had written to Southey 5 years earlier when half-trying to wriggle out of the engagement, "But, Southey, I will do my duty!" (CL I 145)

Ten years later when Coleridge was lecturing on *Romeo and Juliet*, he argued that Rosaline's presence was dramatically and psychologically relevant, and his comments sound autobiographical:

The origin and cause of love was a consciousness of imperfection, and an unceasing desire to remedy it: it was a yearning after an ideal image... Romeo had formed his ideal; he imagined that Rosaline supplied the deficiency; but the moment he beheld Juliet he discovered his mistake... and the love he felt formed the foundation of the tragedy.  
(LL I 337)

Staying in London might have secured for him the more regular income as a journalist, and eased the money worries that his wife undoubtedly experienced. Nevertheless they moved into Greta Hall in Keswick on July 24, 1800, and it was to be Mrs Coleridge's home for the next 29 years. Derwent was born in September and family life was re-established. Over the next 2 years there were times when Coleridge was full of energy, such as his nine-day excursion across the central fells and down Scafell Pike. From his letters to Sara when he was away, it is evident that there were some bitter arguments between them, but also times of truce. All might be well if Sara Hutchinson could be accepted as his friend, and he even suggested that she should attend the birth of their next child so that they could get to know each other really well. But the *Verse Letter to Sara Hutchinson* of April 1802 showed how deeply the depression bit into him:

My own peculiar Lot, my house-hold Life  
It is, & will remain, Indifference or Strife. (CL II 794))

The word "lot" suggests chance rather than choice, meted out especially for him in the three preceding qualifiers "my own peculiar"; the emphasis of "my house-hold life" then encloses his bleak present and future in the rhymed couplet "It is, and will remain, indifference or strife". In contrast he pictures Wordsworth about to marry into the Hutchinson family:

When thou, & with thee those, whom thou lov'st best,  
Shall dwell together in one happy Home,  
One House, the dear *abiding* Home of All. (CL II 793)

Wordsworth's "house-hold" is a "happy home" and seems full of people, with "thou" and "thee" and "those" and "thou", all dwelling in a rhythmic harmony.

In July the Wordsworths began their slow journey to France to settle matters with Annette Vallon before the wedding on October 4, the seventh anniversary day of the Coleridges' own marriage.

As feared, the first winter in northerly Keswick troubled his health, for he had a recurrence of rheumatic fever, took opium, which then gave him acute stomach pains. There was no agreement on causes or treatment, as Kenneth Boyd showed us in his lecture here last year. By 1802, Erasmus Darwin suspected there might be dangers in continued use of opium - or indeed of any medicine—but Beddoes still thought it safer than tea or wine. Whether it was a narcotic or a stimulant was also debatable. Coleridge chose to go on long walks partly as a safer form of stimulant. In November he went south to visit Tom Wedgwood who was in even worse health, vaguely planning to seek somewhere warmer together, but intending to return home by January when the next child was expected. During this time he wrote eight letters to his wife containing some extraordinary and detailed analysis of their two natures, mostly complimentary to himself. After listing her inferior points in one letter written at half past five one morning, he adds,

If you read this Letter with half the Tenderness, with which it is written, it will do you & both of us, GOOD; [& contribute it's share to the turning of a mere Cat-hole into a Dove's nest!] You know, Sally Pally! I must have a Joke—or it would not be me! (CL II 888)

Two weeks later he was considering possible names for their child. "If a Girl... you may take your choice of Sara, Gretha, or rather Algretha, Rotha, Laura, or Lovenna. The Boy must be either Bracey, or Crescelly" (the name of the place in Wales where he was staying) "Algretha Coleridge will needs be a beautiful Girl.—" (CL II 892). This does not entirely fit with his often-quoted exclamation in a letter to Southey 3 weeks later about the early arrival of "a healthy—GIRL! I had never thought of a Girl as a possible event ." (CL II 902). I think this remark hides a mixture of alarm and surprised delight: his sons would have a sister, his wife the companionship of a daughter, and he would now experience at first hand—if he stayed around long enough - the innocence of the feminine. He had just been staying with the Allens in Crescelly and had written about their three good-natured daughters: "What sweeter & more tranquillizing pleasure is there, than to feel one's self completely innocent among completely innocent young Women!" (CL II 890)

When he was away from Greta Hall, his letters home, usually addressed to "My dear Sara", were often closed with the words "your faithful husband". The general consensus is that he did remain faithful to her, although Anya Taylor in her recent book *Erotic Coleridge* (90) seems not totally convinced: "Now and then a word or two sets one wondering." Divorce was costly and

rare, based on an assumption of female adultery, and women had no legal rights or protection. His views on the sanctity of marriage always remained strong, a subject that he discussed at length in *Aids to Reflection*. The Established Church and his father's place in it formed his background, although his instinct was to respond to new ways of thinking. Writing to John Thelwall soon after moving to Nether Stowey, he put forward a practical reason for marriage, "by which word I mean not the effect of spells uttered by conjurors, but *permanent* cohabitation useful to Society as the best conceivable means (in the present state of Soc. at least:) of ensuring nurture & systematic education to infants & children... Unchastity *may* be no vice—I think, it is—but it may be no vice, abstractly speaking." (CL I 306) Later Notebook entries for 1809 and 1810 show similar thoughts: "Reciprocal & Exclusive Love the undoubted Source of Marriage, domestic Charities, thence of Society, of all that secures, softens, ornaments, elevates, disanimalizes, coelestializes the human Being." (CN 3729) Love was not "a mere matter of feeling", "a romantic Hum", but an "act of the will". (CN III 3562). In a long and frank letter of January 1819 giving advice to a young man, he calls marriage "a step which once taken is irretrievable" (CL IV 903-9). Even while knowing he had shut himself off from this ideal, he held fast to his principles.

But to return to the realities of Greta Hall and 1802: Coleridge sums up his relationship in a letter to Poole later that year:

Mrs Coleridge enjoys her old state of excellent Health. We go on, as usual—except that tho' I do not love her a bit better, I quarrel with her much less. We cannot be said to live at all as Husband & Wife / but we are peaceable Housemates. (CL II 525)

This might not seem the most propitious situation for their daughter's birth on December 22, 1802. It is well known that her 26 page Memoir begins with the fact that the birth of her three brothers was recorded by their father in the Family Bible, but, she writes, "the entry of my birth is in my dear mother's handwriting, and this seems like an omen of our lifelong separation, for I never lived with him more than a few weeks at a time." (SCML 2)

This may be the moment to suggest that the 'home' Coleridge had hoped to construct with his wife was too combustible to be contained in any one bell jar, (to borrow a metaphor from Humphrey Davy's chemistry), that the great experiment of living for this "master spirit" had to fracture into manageable parts. In modern terms Greta Hall might be described as a refuge for a dysfunctional family. Kathleen Jones has given us a full account in her book *A Passionate Sisterhood* of the struggles and strengths of the growing household, with Robert Southey eventually in charge of the three Fricker sisters and their children. This was a few decades before the growth of a large middle-class and the later development of the nuclear family (which is now perhaps becoming less usual again); fathers were likely to work at a distance from home if they had no private income, and households often included unmarried or widowed

sisters, orphaned children and live-in servants. His sons, particularly Hartley, must have been deeply affected by his irregular absences and changes of mood, and the problem of finding enough money for their education; but perhaps Sara's childhood might be described as stable and relatively happy. She certainly had an unusually good education for a girl, was given free access to Southey's huge library, valued her contact with the Wordsworths, and loved her mother. Coleridge made only a few references to his daughter in his notebooks and letters. At 8 months "she is quietness itself—very lively, & joyous; but all in a quiet way of her own / She feeds on her Quietness... She has large blue eyes." (CL II 977) Sara later recalled how he liked to see her dressed in white, "expressive of... delicacy and purity", and "could not abide" her scarlet socks, (SCML 21)—a small indication of his obsession with the abstract idea of feminine innocence. The year after her birth he insured his life for £1,000 in favour of Mrs Coleridge, and never allowed the premium to lapse. His visits to the Lake District stopped in 1812 and Sara did not see him again for ten years.

During this time of being an absentee father Coleridge worked in bouts of enormous energy, sending money to Greta Hall when he could, writing & publishing 28 issues of *The Friend*, lecturing in London and Bristol, preparing *Remorse* for Drury Lane and publishing *Christabel*, *The Statesman's Manual*, and *Biographia Literaria*. He also experienced the breach with Wordsworth and the worst opium overdose of his life.

In 1822 Mrs Coleridge arranged a journey south for herself and Sara which would last 8 months, (a kind of 'coming-out' for her 19 year-old daughter), visiting old friends and family, and most importantly spending 3 weeks in Highgate with, or near, the Gillmans where Coleridge was now living in what was becoming his most enduring home. Mrs Coleridge wrote to Poole that it was of "the greatest satisfaction to all parties" (*Minnor Among Tritons* 99), but that is the only comment we have about this momentous meeting. There was also another momentous meeting, as Henry Nelson Coleridge came to Highgate to see his cousin and in less than 3 months they had become engaged. This was to remain a secret until he had established his career in the law and could support a wife. However, 18 months later he returned to Ottery St Mary to recover from an illness and mentioned his marital hopes to his father, the Colonel, who opposed the match for financial reasons. Sara's reply shows stubborn independence: "When I gave my heart to him I gave it for good & all, & never will I take it back till I see he is weary of the gift: then I certainly will never trust any of his sex with it again... Such being my feelings... nothing that may be said by anyone with regard to this affair can have the slightest power to weaken or strengthen them." (SC to JTC 17 Aug 1824 [Mudge 36]). She had a strong view, as had her father, about the commitment of marriage.

The wedding took place 5 years later in September 1829 in Crosthwaite Church. During the long engagement at home in Greta Hall she had studied,

read *Aids to Reflection* and other of her father's work, written translations and essays, and given lessons to Southey's younger children. After the wedding the couple moved to Hampstead, and, as Mudge neatly comments, "she acquired an affectionate husband, economic security, and ten years of uninterrupted pregnancy". (Mudge 2) Mrs Coleridge was soon invited to live with them to give her daughter advice and help when Herbert was born. Sara did not share her mother's robustness in childbearing, and was soon suffering from what was called "derangement of the nervous system". She began to take opium, regarding herself as an invalid, and spent more time reading (including books on hysteria), and writing letters to friends and verses for her children. In January, 1834, the year of Coleridge's final illness and death, she gave birth to twins who survived only a few days, and this pushed her into further depression and hysteria. She wrote a long essay, *Nervousness*, written in the form of a dialogue between *Invalid* and *Good Genius*, examining the relationship between the physical and psychological aspects of her illness, in an attempt to take control of her own behaviour.

Coleridge's death focussed her mind on his published and unpublished writing. She began to feel it a moral duty to make it more widely known, because it would "introduce a higher & more improving mode of thinking", and would "be widely influential for good purposes". (SC to TP 5 Sept 1834, Mudge 72) She, too, was thinking about the broader sphere of society, and was beginning to see a way to satisfy her lively and analytical mind within the demands of family life, especially since Henry also was involved in reviewing and editing Coleridge's *Poems* and *Table Talk*.

But the worst crisis was yet to come. A long overdue visit to Ottery St. Mary took place in August 1836. Sara was ill most of the time, staying in her room at the Manor House, working on an edition of *Aids to Reflection*, and dreading the 5-day journey back to London. In October she set off with Herbert and Edith, now aged 6 and 4, and their nurse. Henry, as often, was too busy with legal work to accompany them, and when this happened the couple seem to have written to each other almost every day, which accounts for the large number of archive letters. When they reached Ilchester, she felt so ill (perhaps fearing another pregnancy or miscarriage) that she sent the children back to Ottery and stayed on her own at the inn for more than a month. "I am not now pleading to remain here till that time [Christmas]" she wrote to Henry, "but I must tell you that were it possible it *would* be of the greatest service. The journey being at a distance my mind would be calm though sorrowful; time would bring strength: my nerves would be further advanced from the period of vaginal shock, & thus my horror would *not* be so great as it is now." (10 Nov 1836, Mudge 90). Like her father she closely analysed her physical complaints and their debilitating effect on her emotions: getting some kind of control over them by withdrawing seemed essential. She needed time alone to think and write.

During this brief seclusion in Ilchester she transcribed some of her father's

marginalia and revised *Phantasmion*, the story she had started for her children. She had enjoyed fairy tales as a child and thought that they were important in developing the imagination, were “wholesome food, by way of variety, for the childish mind. It is curious that on this point Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Lamb, my father, my Uncle Southey, and Mr Wordsworth, were all agreed.” (SCML I 175) This long complex beautifully written fantasy became much more than a child’s story, (perhaps a parallel is Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*). It contains a touching daughter/father relationship and it is tempting to look for links to her own experience, but it would be as inappropriate as trying to identify the figures in *The Ancient Mariner* or *Christabel*. It was published in 1837 anonymously and she added the envoy about 8 years later, which shows, I think, that she continued to be concerned about its reception:

Go, little book, and sing of love and beauty,  
To tempt the worldling into fairy land;  
Tell him that airy dreams are sacred duty,  
Bring better wealth than all his toils command -  
Toils fraught with mickle harm.

But if thou meet some spirit high and tender  
On blessed works and noblest love intent:  
Tell him that airy dreams of Nature’s splendour,  
With graver thoughts and hallowed musings blent,  
Prove no too earthly charm.

In his article in the summer Bulletin (NS 33) Peter Swaab quotes and writes about another poem, *Time’s Acquittal*, and both poem and commentary are well worth reading. He also suggests that Sara can sound rather lecturing at times as in the first stanza of this Envoy. Certainly there is a moralising undertone, but I think she lightens this by using the word “tempt” which usually introduces something naughty and fun: the worldling might expect to be told, “Don’t be tempted!”; while the noble spirit of the second stanza might expect, but doesn’t get, undiluted praise. The rhythm, rhyme and choice of words are pleasingly balanced between the two stanzas to show that everyone can gain by opening their minds to other experiences, to inhabit for a time a mental space where the usual boundaries of behaviour disappear, where the material and the holy can be brought together by the imagination. It reflects Coleridge’s belief that our *being* mattered more than our *doing*; that what is precious is the “shaping spirit of imagination”. These “airy dreams” can help us to interpret the random events of life. Mrs Coleridge might have called them “airy castles”, impractical schemes that wouldn’t bring in money for the next meal. Sara analysed this difference in a letter to Henry in 1834, quoted by E L Griggs (*Coleridge Fille* 105-6):

The sort of wife to have lived harmoniously with my father need not have possessed high intellect or a perfect temper... but greater enthusiasm of temperament than my mother possessed. She never admires anything she doesn't understand. (The Frickers) are too literal and do not believe as I do that matters of imagination... can work as many practical effects as what we see with our eyes and touch with our hands... Neither had my mother that dexterity in managing the temper of others which is often a substitute for an even temper in the possessor.

Like many children's tales *Phantasmion* starts with the device of getting the parents out of the way so that the main characters can take life into their own hands. Phantasmion's mother dies on page 5 and his father on page 7. The setting is a kind of medieval Tuscany nestling into the Lake District. She had already translated and published the 16th Century *The Right Joyous and Pleasant History of the Chevalier Bayard*, many of whose exploits took place in Italy. In *Phantasmion* there is no overriding moral, no division between goodies and baddies, though there is plenty of scheming and confrontation—human beings tend to want the same thing. Magic plays its part: sometimes Phantasmion can fly, or leap like a grasshopper “to renew the delights and wonders of childhood”. After nearly 400 pages of adventures among the mountains, lakes and islands all described in exquisite detail, both in prose and in the 35 interspersed poems, he finds himself back in the garden where he started, but his “airy dream” has not been in vain: “(He) looked round in momentary dread, lest Iarine should have proved a spirit and vanished like the rest; but there she stood, her face beaming bright as ever in full sunshine.” (387). There is no marriage at the end to break the spell of innocent young love. The storyline is complicated, though the reader is not pressed into looking for meaning or motive behind the action. The water witch, Seshelma, not exactly evil, but sinister, remains a witch, and does not flicker in and out of her human form as, for example, Geraldine does in the power she exerts over Christabel with her Serpent's eyes. In both that poem—referred to as a “faery tale” in the *Biographia*—and this story there is a feeling of events having a rhythm of their own which leaves the characters exposed to uncertainty. I would like to read a short passage to illustrate this:

While standing thus on the river's brim, he felt something cold and slimy touching his foot between the straps of the sandal, and soon a slippery hand glided up his leg. Phantasmion had no time to consider what this might be, for the touch was as that of a torpedo, and he had received an electrical shock which benumbed his whole body. While he stood stupified and motionless, again he felt the terrible hand grasping his leg, and attempting to drag him into the river. Then, he hastily drew his sword, and smote that which was pulling at his leg; whereupon a hissing sound... issued from the water, which was tinged for a moment with blood. Phantasmion looked down and beheld the flat white face of the fishy woman, Seshelma, glistening in the moonlight; she leaned backward

in the tide as if she were faint with pain, and her great glassy eyes... seemed to express more of slow malice than of any keen sensation. Soon, however, she gathered strength, and turning about began to dive away into the deeper water. (44)

I have found no references to *Christabel* in Sara's *Memoir* or in any of her letters or diary entries quoted in Swaab or Mudge. We know that in 1847 a manuscript copy that Coleridge had written for Asra was sent to her by Dora Wordsworth (Quillinan) as she lay dying of consumption at Rydal Mount:

Dearest Sara, this original manuscript of your Father's was transcribed for Aunt Sarah. My Mother gave it to me on my Aunt's death: & I give it to you knowing how precious it must be to you for all their sakes, & being sure it will be prized for mine also as a memorial of a life long friendship.

Sara was a shrewd critic of poetry, and it would be interesting to know how she responded to this poem written in the years just before she was born, in which the blue eyes of the Lady Christabel are mentioned three times, "raised to heaven", "more bright than clear" and "innocent". Coleridge's "uneasy doubts" about marriage and childbirth seem here to struggle for resolution: the nurturing mother figure is both needed and rejected; the father figure is fearful of the loss of feminine innocence, but at the same time is encouraging it, not only for his own delight, but also because it can be a creative and healing process, until Love's excess upsets the balance. These "uneasy doubts" seem never to have left him. Even in his fifties Coleridge reacted with alarm to the news of the engagements of both Derwent and Sara, whose marriages proved to be loving and supportive. He advised a young man contemplating marriage to ask himself, "Are we suited to each other? Does she *seriously* adopt all my opinions on all important subjects? Has she that known docility of nature which, uniting with true wifely love, will dispose her to do so?" (CL IV 903-9) Sara certainly had strong opinions of her own, but she also had the "true wifely love" to take on the responsibility of motherhood even though she suffered physically. Writing verses for her children became a way of controlling her feelings, and composing *Phantasmion* kept any subversive fears hidden within an acceptable framework.

The book was greeted with mixed reviews and was not republished during her lifetime. She turned instead to religious philosophy, and started writing the essay *On Rationalism* which would later be printed as an appendix to the 1843 *Aids to Reflection*. Some of the reviews and reports of her father's life and writing had angered her, and she was determined to correct inaccuracies and misjudgements. Mudge uses the expression "she nursed her father's reputation back to health" (Mudge 101) and the word "nursed" fits well. Sara had the intellect and cast of mind to grapple with his ideas and the way they permeated through his writing, and it was important to her that some order should be

apparent. James and Ann Gillman had been remarkable in their “nursing” of his addiction, his social disposition and need for family life, and his yearning for tenderness. Sara wouldn’t have had the strength for any of that, but now she found she had a role as a sympathetic mind. She could feel that she was properly his daughter after all.

Then, in January 1841, Henry fell ill with what was diagnosed as “spinal paralysis”. He never recovered, was confined to bed for many months and died 2 years later in January 1843. Sara was full of grief, “So ends the great charm of this world to me” (IT lxxv); but she also found that she continued to have an appetite for work. Perhaps for the first time in her life she felt independent. To be paid for reviews, even if published anonymously, would now seem legitimate, as would having to organise the family finances; and, importantly, she was also free from pregnancies. Two years later, however, there was another disruption in the household when her mother died suddenly:

Her character rises upon me now as I look back upon it, and compare her *perfect* simplicity and honesty, her union of steady, deep affection for those she was concerned with by blood or friendship, her earnest gratitude... and dispassionate views. Hasty she was at the moment of provocation, but never was anyone more just to all mankind, less swayed by peevish resentment in her deliberate judgments. (SCML I 369)

One of Sara’s first tasks now was to ask permission to dedicate the second edition of the *Biographia* to Wordsworth, signing it “With deep affection, admiration, and respect, your Child in heart, and faithful Friend”, a recognition of her close relationship with him during the first two decades of her life. He gave his consent, although letters suggest that her introduction and the Book itself “contains many things not at all to my taste”. Sara was aware that her “intellectualism” (“prosing” she sometimes called it) was not always acceptable to others, but she was becoming more confident in acknowledging its importance to herself. It was a gateway to what was far deeper down, “the individual, moral, personal being.” (Mudge 134).

Sara spent the 8 years of her widowhood caring for the health and education of her two children, Herbert and Edith, and working on her father’s publications. In 1847 she wrote: “The printers are now sending the [proof] sheets of the *Biographia Literaria*. Dear Miss Fenwick, the trouble I have taken with this book is ridiculous to think of—it is a filial phenomenon—nobody will thank me for it, and no one will know or see a twentieth part of it. But I have done the thing *con amore*”(ML 2 40). She then published *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* and *Literary Remains*. Finally she sifted through decades of *Morning Post* and *Courier* newspapers searching out articles written by her father, mostly anonymous, so she became skilled at recognising his style and cast of mind, describing the work as “painstaking and jog-trot drudgery”. These were published as *Essays on His Own Times*. Only one was questioned by David Erdman, the recent editor, as possibly not attributable to STC.

Although Sara had thought that nobody would thank her for her labours, each volume of the Bollingen Collected Works “is dedicated in gratitude to the family editors in each generation”; and she was given particular acknowledgement by James Engell and W Jackson Bate in their introduction to the *Biographia*, “Our debt to the work of Sara Coleridge is particularly heavy” (BL I xvii). A shared devotion to her father’s mind must have been an important and creative part of the thirteen years of her life with Henry: imagine him, newly married and trying to develop his chancery practice as a barrister to support his family, living in the Middle Temple during the week and apparently often walking back to Hampstead for the weekend via Highgate so that he could listen to his Uncle’s conversation, transcribing it the next day. When he died, Hartley dedicated a sonnet to him -

How shall I praise thee right, and not offend?  
 For thou wast sent a sore heart-ill to mend.  
 Twin stars were ye, thou and thy wedded love. (TT lxxiv)

I have concentrated in this talk on Sara. Hartley and Derwent had perhaps even more complex relationships with their father. Any sense of a shared home lay in their awareness of his great mind. Sara particularly felt this. Sixteen years after his death she wrote:

He seems ever at my ear, in his books, more especially in his marginalia—speaking not personally to me, and yet in a way so natural to my feelings, that *finds* me so fully, and awakens such a strong echo in my mind and heart, that I seem more intimate with him now than I ever was in life. (SCML II 257)

This is very precise: his presence in his writing awakens an echo, a resonance, in her mind and heart; and the word “awakens” suggests that his thoughts were already her own, that she was finding both her father and herself as she read and studied his work. Moreover, this was a two-way process: her father was *finding* her, was at last beginning to know her in a way that before had not been possible.