

‘Fragments from the universal’: Division and Unity in Hartley Coleridge’s Poetics of Relationship¹

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TWO YEARS AFTER HARTLEY COLERIDGE’S DEATH, the bulk of this work was presented to the public: in 1851, his brother, Derwent, collected and published 234 unpublished poems, together with a reprint of Hartley’s 1833 *Poems, Songs and Sonnets* and a *Memoir* of Hartley.² Though Derwent initially gives a loving account of his brother, his ultimate judgement of Hartley as an unfulfilled genius is myopic and relentless: three pages (clx-clxii) present Hartley as a broken man and poet, with rhetoric of division, fragmentation and waste. Derwent’s most condemning suggestion is that Hartley’s mind was somehow undeveloped and so precluded imaginative power and serious poetic endeavour: ‘There may have been—I think there was—some faculty wanting in his mind necessary for the completion of any great whole’ (clx). Hartley, according to Derwent, had no sense of order, cohesion, wholeness or continuity: ‘His thoughts did not arrange themselves within artificial limits; the tendency of his genius was to break off, as it were, fragments from the universal, not referable to any particular whole’ (clx).

It is difficult to read Derwent’s critique here without concluding that he is implicitly attacking their father—displacing his frustration at STC’s self-perceived limitations, the repeat of which Derwent views in Hartley, onto Hartley, fearing that they are both inherently flawed. Outwardly, however, in the *Memoir* Derwent elevates STC; while Derwent proposes that ‘the centrifugal and centripetal parts of his [STC’s] mind were well balanced’, he finds that

No such power was ever exhibited by his son [Hartley]; he does not appear ever to have realised even the conception of any great whole. His stream was copious, but it had no banks; it took therefore no certain course, and preserved no body of water; it divided itself into rills, or lost itself in pools (clxi).

Having praised STC as the archetypal and ‘whole’ genius, Derwent presents Hartley as constitutionally ‘divided’, ‘lost’ and, again, unable to realize ‘the conception of any great whole’ (clxi). But STC’s own self-judgement suggests that Derwent is measuring Hartley against an imaginary ideal: STC might also be accused of ‘dividing’ and ‘losing’ his self—in his notebooks, he repeatedly confesses that he was acutely aware of a shortfall of *functioning* strength within himself:³

¹ For an elaboration of this article, see Nicola Healey, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge: The Poetics of Relationship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); this article contains extracts taken from Chapters 1 and 2, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

² *Poems by Hartley Coleridge with a Memoir of his Life by his Brother*, ed. Derwent Coleridge, 2 vols. (London: E. Moxon, 1851). Hereafter abbreviated as *Memoir*.

³ For an extensive study of STC and this characteristic of ‘division’, see Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), where Perry argues that STC’s double-mindedness was a virtue rather than incapacity.

My inner mind does not justify the Thought, that I possess a Genius—my *Strength* is so very small in proportion to my Power—I believe, that I first from internal feeling made, or gave light and impulse to this important distinction, between Strength and Power—the Oak, and the tropic Annual, or Biennial, which grows nearly as high and spreads as large, as the Oak—but the *wood*, the *heart* of Oak, is wanting—the *vital* works vehemently but the *Immortal* is not with it
(CN III 3324).

This self-criticism—‘wanting’ the ‘the *heart* of Oak’—is the same lack of unifying strength and sense of wasted potential that is imposed onto Hartley by Derwent. Furthermore, Derwent’s representation of STC’s ‘stream’ as directed, forceful and productive does not, in fact, correlate with STC’s confession of the ‘streaminess’ of his character, a trait which he also inflicts on the seven-year-old Hartley: he refers to those ‘who are most reverie-ish & streamy—Hartley, for instance & myself’ (CN I 1833). Derwent—as William Wordsworth and STC had done—is projecting STC’s self-perceived weakness onto Hartley, aggravated further, perhaps, by his own disappointment in their father.

Following Derwent’s edition, many nineteenth-century critics do not seriously study Hartley’s poems and simply reproduce Derwent’s assessment, often even romanticizing Hartley himself as a fragment. *Fraser’s Magazine*, for example, enjoys the Romantic notion that Hartley’s poems should be viewed as ‘disjointed tokens of undeveloped powers’ rather than ‘combining portions of an accomplished whole’; the reviewer even portrays Hartley as somehow contaminated, visualizing his poems dramatically as ‘glittering fragments of Venice Crystal, showing what the vase might have been ere it was burst and shattered by the poison’.⁴ All this terminology is clearly inherited from Derwent’s distorted representation of Hartley.

Proper analysis of Hartley’s verse reveals the complete opposite of Derwent’s judgement to be true; as Edmund Blunden points out in 1929, ‘Incomplete, eccentric, confused, interrupted as the story of Hartley Coleridge must be, to adventure into his poems is to pass into a sphere of completeness, and method, and continuity’.⁵ I argue that what Derwent interprets as a fragmentation within Hartley’s poetic-self is, in fact, a defining characteristic of Hartley’s relational poetics. This does not indicate a lack of poetic integrity, but rather a more intense, albeit fragile sensibility which finds its strongest expression through foregrounding the miniature and the apparently marginal, and through connection and environmental awareness. In this way, I show that Hartley’s work displays a powerful development of what Anne Mellor defines as ‘feminine Romanticism’,⁶ and also a more assured assertion of STC’s

⁴ Anon, ‘Hartley Coleridge as Man, Poet, Essayist’, *Fraser’s Magazine in Littell’s Living Age* 30, No. 375 (26 July 1851): 149–50.

⁵ Edmund Charles Blunden, ‘Coleridge the Less’, *TLS* 1449 (7 November 1929): 882.

⁶ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 171.

belief that 'multitude & division are not (o mystery) necessarily subversive of unity' (CN II 2332).

I want to foreground Hartley's understanding of relationship (a form of fragmentation) as being central to identity, and also how this is mirrored in his deconstruction of identity itself, in all its minute forms—whether it be the matter of a pin or a drop of water—to show how his vision of separateness and the transient still forms part of a cohesive whole, rather than being lost 'rills' and 'pools' of imagination. Hartley thus unites fragments of being with the universal, the 'great whole', in his driving endeavour to trace the origin and purpose of life (*Memoir* I clxi). I will show that Hartley understood a greater unity within creation than Derwent credits him with, which enabled him to build a distinct and 'whole' poetic identity; not only does Derwent interpret this relational vision negatively, he transposes it through a rhetoric of fragmentation back onto Hartley, which has had the ultimate effect of us viewing Hartley himself as somehow 'fragmented' and overlooking '*the facts of his being*'—his poems.⁷

To begin with the unity of social relationship, in 'From Country to Town' ('Continued') Hartley describes a state of powerful alienation when separated from friends:

'TIS strange to me, who long have seen no face,
That was not like a book, whose every page
I knew by heart, a kindly common-place,
And faithful record of progressive age—[...]⁸

By comparing friends to well-read books, Hartley compounds both the reassuring constancy of familiarity and the variability of human kinship. Though the 'face' is a physical element viewed in the present, Hartley's close 'reading' collapses the boundaries of time and tangibility: each friendly face is read as a history book. Hartley is elaborating on the idea of the book as a metaphor for personal history which William presents in *The Prelude*: 'The face of every neighbour whom I met / Was as a volume to me'.⁹ Dorothy Wordsworth too, in 'Grasmere—A Fragment', describes how relocation can threaten identity: 'A Stranger, Grasmere, in thy Vale, / All faces then to me unknown'.¹⁰ Like Hartley, Dorothy experiences a paradoxical inhibition within freedom; an 'Inmate of this vale' she feels confined due to the unfamiliar faces—of both land and people—thus both writers stress that identity only becomes fully realized through connection with one's external environment (187, l. 87).¹¹

⁷ *The Poetical Works of Bowles, Lamb, and Hartley Coleridge*, ed. William Tirebuck (London: Walter Scott, 1888), xxxii.

⁸ *The Complete Poetic Works of Hartley Coleridge*, ed. Ramsay Colles (London: George Routledge and Sons), 15, ll. 1-4. All further references to Hartley's poems will be to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

⁹ *The Thirteen-Book Prelude, by William Wordsworth*, ed. Mark L. Reed, vol. II (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 63, IV, ll. 70-1

¹⁰ Susan Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 185-6, ll. 49-50.

¹¹ While 'inmate' did not denote imprisonment in nineteenth-century usage, it was applied to mental asylum patients, or used to describe a person who does not entirely belong to the place where they dwell.

Importantly, Hartley reads (or does not read) his own past in these 'unknown' faces:

To wander forth, and view an unknown race;
Of all that I have been, to find no trace,
No footstep of my by-gone pilgrimage.
(15, ll. 5-7)

This isolation again echoes *The Prelude*, where William finds himself, in London, lost amongst a sea of strangers: 'the face of everyone / That passes by me is a mystery!' (VII, ll. 594-5). Hartley goes further than William by implying that his past, and therefore his identity, becomes dissolved when amongst strangers, who appear so foreign to him they are viewed as an 'unknown race' (ll. 5, 6). The recognition of others confirms and strengthens Hartley's selfhood, past and present; the blankness of strangers, in contrast, negates him. In short, loss of relationship leads to loss of self.

In *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Jean Baker Miller states that this strong relational selfhood, the need for a constant other, is associated particularly with women, whose 'sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships'.¹² Disruption of this network leads to a self-dissolution akin to Hartley's, which is 'perceived not as just a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self' (Miller 1986, 83). While Miller states that this need for affiliation makes women more vulnerable, she stresses that it is also a 'fundamental strength' which enables a 'more advanced' way of 'living and functioning':

[...] For everyone—men as well as women—individual development proceeds *only* by means of connection. At the present time, men are not as prepared to *know* this (89, 83).

Hartley's writings qualify Miller's biological determinism: his writings *do* know that 'individual development proceeds *only* by means of connection', which suggests that gender is not the only determining factor. Hartley's need to find the past in the present reveals, though, the fragility of a relational selfhood: memory becomes vital to maintain past relations, who are no longer immediately available, for self-preservation. Thus, it is only in these vulnerable periods of transition that the relational self could be perceived as 'fragmented': Hartley shows how identity is subject to continual reconstruction if growth and survival are to take place.

Hartley's representation of identity here strongly suggests a Lockean influence: in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke's theory of a continuing consciousness, in his understanding of the 'Organization of Parts in one coherent Body, partaking of one Common Life [...] in a like continued Organization', is the exact notion that underpins Hartley's notion of identity as

¹² Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1986), 83.

fluid, changing and realized through dynamic relationship.¹³ In *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798*, David Fairer argues that the 'one life' concept employed by William Wordsworth and STC derives from Locke's 'earlier more embodied principle, which directly confronts the problem of time and change, and which raises difficult questions about how identity can be sustained through a period of repeated loss and replacement'.¹⁴ Hartley's poetry, more strongly than his immediate forefathers, develops Locke's understanding of identity as partaking in 'one Common Life'; thus Hartley himself, and his poetry, abides by the principles of this doctrine by connecting and communicating with his eighteenth-century literary inheritance.

The concluding image of 'From Country to Town' is striking in its distillation of Hartley's absolute isolation:

Thus like one drop of oil upon a flood,
In uncommunicating solitude,
Single am I amid the countless many.
(15, ll. 12-14)

With the impermeable drop of oil Hartley concentrates the sense of impenetrability which pervades the poem. Like the drop of oil which is destined never to mix with water, so Hartley believes an 'uncommunicating' existence to be an ostracism from humanity, even a form of contamination—of self and society. The reiteration of his solitude—'one drop', 'uncommunicating solitude', 'Single am I'—consolidates his stark exclusion and the realization that, in essence, he ceases to exist when not part of a familiar community (ll. 12, 13, 14). In this way, the drop of oil comes to symbolize his unnatural separation from 'the flood' of humanity and suggests that companionship combats the toxic build up of loneliness (l. 12). Hartley's ultimate suggestion is that human identity is not meant to be as 'one drop of oil'—that is, an isolated, insular entity—but rather a drop of water, 'a drop of the eternal spring', as Hartley terms it in 'Let me not deem that I was made in vain'; distinct in itself, but also able to merge with a larger changeable, but ultimately more powerful, eternal source (112, l. 13). Hartley thus identifies with a permeable, boundless selfhood—under this definition, it is the isolated *self* that is a divided fragment.

In 'Fragment', a poem which seeks to comprehend the origin of all existence, Hartley compares the essence of life—'The living spark'—before it is claimed and regulated within physical existence explicitly to a drop of water: 'A drop of being, in the infinite sea, / Whose only duty, essence, was to be' (74, ll. 19, 21-2). Hartley here manifests STC's notion that 'Change and Permanence [can] co-exist':

[...] not by combination or juxtaposition, but by an absolute

¹³ John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), II, xxvii, 331.

¹⁴ David Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

annihilation of difference / column of smoke, the fountains before
 St Peter's, waterfalls / God!—Change without loss—change by a
 perpetual growth, that [at] once constitutes & annihilates change
 the past, & the future included in the Present // oh! it is awful.
 (CN II 2832)

Such a contradictory fusion is beyond comprehension for STC as it collapses the boundaries of time and logic. In STC's recurrent, enigmatic depictions of a floating or divided self in his notebooks he often seems bewildered and frightened by the realization that his identity is not wholly internally governed and is so dependent on his nearest kin: 'I would make a pilgrimage to the Deserts of Arabia to find the man who could make [me] understand how the *one can be many!*' (CN I 1561). Hartley, meanwhile, more readily accepts the apparent ego-diffusion, even -annihilation which a relational selfhood engenders in order to become part of a more permanent and meaningful universal state-of-being. As William states in 'Home at Grasmere', the 'noblest' state-of-being, though 'divided from the world', incorporates the one into the many: 'The true community, the noblest Frame / Of many into one incorporate'.¹⁵ Hartley thus evokes and unites the Platonic idea of the One (a higher reality, or God) and the many (an earthly, materialistic division).

Hartley's awareness of one universal and connecting life-force is paramount, yet he is also acutely sensitive to the distinct individuality of each life. In 'Lines' ('Oh for a man, I care not what he be'), he wonders at the sheer diversity of nature and humanity:

I love my country well,—I love the hills,
 I love the valleys and the vocal rills;
 But most I love the men, the maids, the wives,
 The myriad multitude of human lives.¹⁶
 (211, ll. 29-32)

Such effusive love shows the pure joy Hartley takes in human life—in being alive—which powerfully reverses the popular conception of Hartley as sorrowful and introverted. Hartley's enthusiasm for the word 'myriad' encapsulates this awe and the impossibility of quantifying such diversity. The word 'myriad' (which the *OED* defines as 'countless', but which derives from the Greek term for 10,000) measures both his appreciation of the importance of every individual life *and* his acknowledgment that each life forms part of an incalculable whole. It is a word that *suggests* individual value, but a value which is at once diluted through the innumerable quantity of that which the term also defines.

Hartley gives his most striking representation of these elusive contradictions of subjectivity when he compares man to a mere pin in his essay 'Pins'. By

¹⁵ *Home at Grasmere: Part First, Book First of 'The Recluse', by William Wordsworth*, ed. Beth Darlington (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), 90, ll. 824, 819-20.

¹⁶ Cf. STC's 'Hymn to the Earth' (1799), where STC also wonders at the 'Myriad myriads of lives' that 'teemed forth' from the Earth.

exploring the metallic pin's essential atomic structure and changeable form, Hartley suggests that the essence of matter, whether it be of man or metal, is paradoxically at once eternally present, yet in an unclassifiable state of constantly becoming, never in existence save in the form it temporally inhabits: 'forms are all fleeting, changeable creatures of time and circumstance, will and fancy: there is nothing that abides but a brute inert mass, and even that has no existence at any time, but in the form which then it bears'.¹⁷ In 'Address to certain Gold Fishes', Hartley's description of the fishes' incessant movement—their 'flitting, flashing, billowy gleams'—captures this state of perpetual restlessness and indefinable integral structure as the darting, vibrant fish constantly elude a perceptible form:

Restless forms of living light
Quivering on your lucid wings,
Cheating still the curious sight
With a thousand shadowings; [...].
(86, ll. 8, 1-4)

It is a dazzling depiction that mirrors STC's perception of starlings in flight in November 1799, which he likewise perceives as being one force field of matter with a constantly unfixed and volatile outline: 'Starlings in vast flights drove along like smoke, mist, or any thing misty [without] volition [...] some [moments] glimmering & shivering, dim & shadowy, now thickening, deepening, blackening!' (CN I 582).¹⁸ Both a shoal of fish and a murmuration of starlings appear more elemental than material as their baffling wave movement and cohesive integrity 'cheat' the reality that they comprise of 'thousand[s]' of individual 'shadowings' rather than being one self-initiated organism (86, l. 4): both natural entities perfectly embody how the myriad '*one can be many!*' and the mystery of how they become vitally united and driven (CN I 1561). On an even more infinitesimal level, Hartley applies this same sentiment to an atom—the building block of all creation, and (then) the only entity that could not be broken down further, but which is still governed by this same condition of perpetual flux and essential loss: 'an atom, motion, air, or flame, / Whose essence perishes by change of form' (203, ll. 21-2).

Hartley's fascination with the essence of matter and being here, which has no identifiable beginning or end, again shows a Lockean understanding of identity as never fixed at any one time, but subject to perpetual change, temporally and successively coming into being through sensory experience and interaction while being connected to a material grounding source: the identity of Man, Locke argues, exists 'in nothing but a participation of the same continued Life, by constantly fleeting Particles of Matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized Body' (Nidditch 1979, II, xxvii, 331-2). But while Locke in these terms more definitely differentiates mere matter from man—

¹⁷ *Essays and Marginalia*, ed. Derwent Coleridge, 2 vols. (London: E. Moxon, 1851), I, 81. Hereafter abbreviated as EM.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Peter Anderson for enabling me to see this echo of STC. See "'Thickening, deepening, blackening": starlings and the object of poetry in Coleridge and Dante', *The Coleridge Bulletin* 32 (Winter 2008): 58.

through man's ability to be 'vitaly united'—Hartley's focus on the pin's pre-existence suggests that even inanimate matter partakes in its own system of organic dynamism:

Let us divide it into matter and form, for it is the form alone that constitutes it a pin. Time was when it slumbered in the chaos of brazen wire, amid the multitude of concentric circles, cycles and epicycles. Time was, too, when that wire was molten in the furnace, when the solid brass became as water, and rushed from its ore with a glowing rapidity. When this took place we know not; what strange mutations the metals may have undergone we cannot conjecture. It may have shone on the breast of Achilles, or ejected the spirit of Hector. (EM I 80-81)

Hartley finds heroism in the pin's matter and connects it to its past—and its past relations—in the way that Keats does for the nightingale ('The voice I hear this passing night was heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown').¹⁹ By tracing the diachronic 'life' of inanimate creation in this way Hartley creates an even greater holistic vision of the interconnectedness of *all* things than William's pantheistic 'one life'. Like STC, Hartley shows an interest in alchemy and synaesthesia which borders on anthropomorphizing the metallic 'ore'—imploing it into life through transmutation. While the atom and the pin cannot breathe the 'fiery spirit which pervades all nature', or experience and derive nourishment from their surroundings (EM II 81)—the vital difference which, as Locke states, distinguishes a mass of matter from a tree—the pin, and the atoms of which it comprises, nonetheless are part of a system of change, regeneration and function. 'Just like this pin is man', Hartley concludes, 'Once he was, while yet he was not' (EM I 81).

These are, as Andrew Keanie recognizes, 'extraordinarily condensed insights', but it is a distinctive trait that has gone largely unnoticed within Hartley's work.²⁰ Hartley's ability to divine the essential truths of creation through an imaginative expansion of minute forms echoes Blake's vision of 'a World in a Grain of Sand' ('Auguries of Innocence', l. 1). While Hartley monumentalizes the pin, he at once humbly diminishes man, showing him to be, like the other microscopic sources and structures of life which he observes—the drifting seed, the drop of water, the atom and the metallic ore—just another tiny element—a fragment—relative to the universe; a mere 'drop of being' (137; 74, l. 21). Hartley's pin self-metaphor encapsulates the tension between intensely felt existence and the cancellation of identity, a problematic faultline by which the relational selfhood exists.

It is not just the miniature form which captured Hartley's imagination, but barely discernable *relationships* too. In 'The Sabbath-Day's Child' he connects 'A star' with its reflection in a 'dimpling rill'; a 'wandering cloud' is seen

¹⁹ 'Ode to a Nightingale', *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 371, ll. 63-4.

²⁰ Andrew Keanie, *Hartley Coleridge: A Reassessment of His Life and Work* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

'Whiten[ing] the lustre of an autumn moon'; and a 'sudden breeze' is noted more by its absence than its presence: it is 'Not mark'd till miss'd' (69, ll. 45, 47-52). The silent and transient inflections of nature's actors actualize not only their identity but that of their recipient—only in relationship is the constant flux of each entity, and their part in a larger 'whole', made more visible. Even light, Hartley notes, exists only through relationship: 'The light—it is not light—till something meets / That gives existence to the light it greets'.²¹

In terms of literal passage—footsteps—rather than sensual inflections, in 'May Morning' Hartley traces the 'delicate foot-mark' left by 'Fair nymphs', 'Tinting the silvery lawn with darker green' (146, ll. 6, 2, 7); while in 'I saw thee in the beauty of thy spring', he records the captivating effect of not just a woman's presence but of her absence—what her footsteps leave behind:

I thought the very dust on which thy feet
Had left their mark exhaled a scent more sweet
Than honey-dew dropt from an angel's wing.
(127, ll. 6-8)

Hartley is drawn to the ephemera which surround material—what we might call insignificant 'fragments from the universal' (*Memoir*, clx): reflections, shadows, dust, foot-marks, in order to define and trace the object and its relationship to the external world; such depictions make the unseen visible. It is this parallel dimension which proves that even the smallest action of nature's constituent parts is perpetually bound into one whole. By tracing not only the appearance of objects but also their movement, and the memory of this, Hartley registers their influence or legacy—their 'mark'—on the world. These tiny poetic records of the passing of the breeze, the nymph and the woman harness and attempt to fix the realm of their transient being, what has never really existed, which, conversely, strengthens and validates their embodied existence. This earnest endeavour may reflect Hartley's anxiety that he would leave no trace of his own life ('Of all that I have been, to find no *trace*, / No *footstep* of my by-gone pilgrimage' (15, ll. 6-7; my italics)). Hartley's visualization of the unstable quality of these passing (in both senses of the word) lives points to the fragility of their existence and subsequent posterity; nonetheless, he monumentalizes the fleeting and 'myriad flaky portions' of each life's real integrity and being (EM I 340).

Hartley's microscopic and Darwinian vision of nature's web of interrelationship distinguishes him from a poet such as Keats, who, Mellor states, typifies the cross-over from masculine to feminine Romantic conventions. Indeed, Hartley's inclusion of the most minute forms of creation into the biological interconnectedness of all living things pre-empts Charles Darwin's awareness of 'how plants and animals, most remote in the scale of nature, are bound together by a web of complex relations'.²² As Keanie notes,

²¹ Hartley Coleridge: *New Poems, Including a Selection from his Published Poetry*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 108, ll. 23-4.

²² *The Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.

Hartley's 'appetite for beauty' was stimulated by sights and sounds 'unseen and unheard by the more prominent poets'; 'Hartley stood in awe before the minute', Keanie writes, 'because it contained the sort of scattered wisdom and power that only he could—or would—assimilate and synthesize (Keanie 2008, 182, 19). Hartley sees 'the life' of things in their literal being, actions and connections rather than having to transcend this and see 'into the life of things' in order to divine the essence and purpose of life, as William Wordsworth does in 'Tintern Abbey' (l. 50; my italics), a remarkable vision which, with the notable exception of Keanie's critical perception, remains, ironically, hitherto unseen.

Judith Plotz recognizes that Hartley's leading theme was 'the greatness of littleness' but does not identify any greatness *in* littleness, as Hartley did, believing this preoccupation to be a reflection and manifestation of his self-perceived poetic and personal inferiority.²³ In 'The Books of My Childhood', Hartley explains that he possessed his incisive vision for the particular isolated image from a very early age:

I doted on birds, and kittens, and flowers. I was not able to take in and integrate an extensive landscape, but a mossy nook, a fancy waterfall, an opening in a wood, an old quarry, or one of those self-sufficing angles which are a dale in miniature, filled me with inexpressible delight (EM I 346).

Hartley here remembers within his childhood the instinctive acute vision which became the foundation of what he perceives to be his mature poetic sensibility. The portrait that Derwent and critics such as Plotz paint of Hartley encapsulates and distorts only this early juncture of his life: he is presented as the child who was 'not able to take in' larger visions and concepts. This critical oversight misjudges what was Hartley's central poetic mission—to celebrate the essence of life, which, he stresses, is most emblematic in the humblest forms of Creation: 'the very meanest child of Adam [...] is a more express image of the great Creator than all the innumerable orbs of lifeless matter that throng infinity' (EM I 238). As Hartley explicitly states too in his sonnet 'What is the meaning of the word "sublime"', there is a greater sublime interpretation, counteractive to the conventional masculine sublime vision, in seeing greatness 'in littleness': 'That is the true sublime, which can confess / In weakness strength, the great in littleness', a reversal of Burke's gendered classification of the sublime (117, ll. 13-14).²⁴ Hartley's 'commitment to miniaturism', as Keanie argues, demands more attention than tradition has allowed him—it enlightens his unique poetics: it is 'the key to our recognition of a figure who both transcended the prevailing modes and concerns of his period and most significantly anticipated the aspects of Modernism' (Keanie 2008, x).

It is telling that the rhetoric of fragmentation with which Derwent condemns Hartley's vision closely paraphrase that of Hartley's essay 'Remarks

²³ Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 205-6.

²⁴ Plotz does not signal that her statement 'the greatness of littleness' is a paraphrase of Hartley's poem.

on Old Age, Passive Imagination, and Insanity', in which, through a brilliant metaphor of the mind as a fragmenting thundercloud, Hartley describes a state of creative psychosis induced by artificial sensual excess. The mind

[...] overstrains and snaps itself, and leaves nothing but disjointed fragments of the tyrannic idea, as we sometimes see a huge black thundercloud shivered into a myriad flaky portions, all impregnated and reddened with the electric fire, yet each assuming some fantastic shape of its own. (EM I 340)

In this essay, Hartley cites both excess alcohol and opium as triggers of this mental 'explosion', which suggests that he is implicitly alluding both to STC's creative imagination and his own here. Crucially, Hartley still sees an essential integrity—an 'electric fire'—within each 'disjointed fragment' of imagination, which is still linked to the 'tyrannic idea', whereas Derwent does not: he views Hartley's genius as embodying broken 'fragments from the universal, not referable to any particular whole' (clx). Perhaps out of irritation at the respective substance dependencies of his father and brother, Derwent twists and misreads Hartley's metaphor, what is implicitly a key defence of Hartley's relational poetic vision and their father—and their addictions—without acknowledgement, in order to bolster his own misguided view of Hartley's 'fractured' genius.

The dialectic between individuality and universality which pervades Hartley's writings supports STC's recognition of a 'contradiction' and confusion within selfhood. But Hartley's sustained emphasis on common, interconnected life amongst man and nature also illuminates and ultimately reconciles what was a major anxiety of STC's and William Wordsworth's: STC's struggle to understand how the '*one can be many!*' and William's wavering pantheistic hope for the 'one life' (CN I 1561). Hartley's strong poetics of relationship demonstrate how within nature, human identity and his own poetic subjectivity, the seemingly 'disjointed fragments' are distinct but *are* all linked to the 'tyrannic idea', Derwent's 'great whole', the conception of which Derwent said lay beyond Hartley's grasp (EM I 340; *Memoir* clx). Hartley's poems are thus like the 'myriad flaky portions' of his exploding thundercloud: 'all impregnated and reddened with the electric fire, yet each assuming some fantastic shape of its own'.