

On the eve of his embarkation to Germany in 1798 Coleridge was moved to reassert that in Thomas Poole he had found a man who embodied the high ideal of friendship: 'Of many friends, whom I love and esteem, my head & heart have ever chosen you as the Friend—as the one being, in whom is involved the full & whole meaning of that sacred Title—God love you, my dear Poole!'. [1] In Poole, friendship's 'sacred Title' becomes embodied, the verb 'involve' suggesting how the Idea 'roll[s] and enwrap[s]' itself within Poole the man. [2] How, though, does the Divine Friend manifest himself as an embodied individual? Does embodiment express the Idea in particular kinds of social behaviour? Coleridge's friendship with Poole strongly suggests that once the Idea of friendship is embodied, questions of gender intrude. This focus enables a re-examination of the traditional thesis that 'Coleridge, like a ship drifting at sea, was drawn to the solid dependability of Poole's character and life' while Poole was attracted to the 'constant intellectual stimulation' offered by Coleridge. [3] Both these tendencies are here interpreted as gendering the male relationship, constructing for each party manly and feminine gender identities, and situating the friends in a wider gendering of the idea of friendship in the 1790s.

Contemporary writings on friendship recognized that the relation might have differently gendered modes of intercourse, a fact witnessed by the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s lengthy entry on 'Friendship' (1792). [4] The encyclopedist reveals that friendship is widely regarded as a manly mode of intercourse, a position implied by those who argue that 'women are incapable of sincerity or constancy in friendship with each other'. This conventional view portrays female friendship as superficial, and denies that women have sufficient moral strength for sustaining friendship. The *Encyclopædia*, however, permits women to participate in this manly intercourse, conceding that the female character is not 'incapable of those virtues which are necessary to establish and support mutual friendship'. In fact, the writer posits an alternative mode of friendship which is characteristically female:

[42]

[Women] are in general possessed of more exquisite sensibility, nicer delicacy of taste, and a juster sense of propriety, than we: nor are they destitute of generosity, fidelity, and firmness. But such qualities are peculiarly favourable to friendship: they communicate a certain charm to the manners of the person who is adorned with them; they render the heart susceptible of generous disinterested attachment.

If 'generosity, fidelity, and firmness' identify a traditionally masculine kind of friendship, the female virtues of sensibility, taste and propriety define a newer more feminine mode of intimacy. The writer thus recognizes a cultural ambiguity concerning the gendered nature of the idea, one which lurks in his conclusion: 'If friendship be ranked among the virtues, it is not less a female than a male virtue' (VII 470).

The history of Coleridge and Poole's relationship suggests how male friends might construct their relation in accordance with these differently gendered modes. Issues of manliness present themselves from the early days of their acquaintance during which time the

men were demonstrating a characteristically late-eighteenth-century enthusiasm for sanctifying friendship through a quasi-marital commitment. Informing Poole of his recent marriage to Sara Fricker in October 1795, Coleridge announces: 'I talked of you on my wedding night—God bless you!—I hope that some ten years hence you will believe and know of my affection towards you what I will not now profess'. [5] The strength of Coleridge's affection is suggested by his thinking of Poole on a night reserved for the exclusive intimacy between a married couple. Coleridge intimates that their male friendship is also a tacit form of marriage, whose affection is comparable to that enjoyed by a man and wife. Coleridge's contention that his affection will be as evident in ten years time effectively signifies a formal avowal of constancy to Poole. In the *Britannica's* terms, this would exemplify the 'fidelity and firmness' of manly friendship. Coleridge signs off with a quasi-marital proposal: 'Believe me, dear Poole! your affectionate & mindful—*Friend*—shall I so soon dare to say?—Believe me, my *heart* prompts it' (I, 161).

In reply, Poole declared: 'I cannot tell you, my dear friend, for such I am sure I may call you, how much I am interested in everything which concerns you'. [6] In deliberately calling Coleridge his 'friend' Poole formally sets his seal on their friendly contract. A year later Poole makes explicit the terms of this marital bond and hints at its manly character:

MY DEAREST FRIEND—the friend held dearest by me. *I say it thinkingly*—and say it as a *full* answer to the first part of your last interesting letter. By you, Coleridge, I will always stand, in sickness and

[43]

health, in prosperity and misfortune; nay, in the worst of all misfortunes, in vice . . . if *vice* should ever taint thee—but it *cannot*. [7]

Echoing the marriage service, Poole's vows affirm that the friends are joined in a spiritual, quasi-marital union. Poole thus constructs the men's friendship as exemplifying a conventional model of 'manly love', in which male affection transcends heterosexual love, tainted as it is by sexuality. [8]

Both Coleridge and Poole maintain this sense of the superiority of the manly bond of friendship. Explaining to Poole in 1801 why he would not publish an account of his German travels, Coleridge boasts that it is '*beneath me*—I say, *beneath me* / for to whom should a young man utter the pride of his Heart if not to the man whom he loves more than all others?' [9] Only to a male friend can Coleridge reveal his highest thoughts and aspirations. But it is Poole who most clearly defines the transcendent character of the male relation. In an unpublished section of an 1803 letter, Poole takes issue with Coleridge's gloomy claim that earthly ties will not endure beyond the grave:

All that is sexual may, nay must be dissolved, and certainly this bears more or less, one way or another upon a great class of our feelings—but yet there is a great class and without doubt the highest class which cannot be twined with this origin—the maternal and filial feelings and all the feelings of advanced age—advanced age! [...] when the little work of human existence is done, and is waiting to be pushed forward, by a mere inspiration, to higher and nobler objects—but we *shall advance together*, knowing as we are known—can I forget the paps which gave me suck? the Beings which have risen with me—all the objects of nature, animated and inanimated which have made me what I am—can I forget what I know of my own creation? [10]

Poole subordinates the sexual tie to more spiritual feelings accruing to familial relations, old age, and friendship itself. While Coleridge's sexual bond with Sara shall 'dissolve' at death, the men friends' spiritual love transcends earthly change: resistant to organic decay it never becomes so weak as to rely on God's inspiration 'to be pushed forward'. On the contrary, the male bond is active and indestructible for the friends '*advance together*' through eternity.

However, Coleridge did not during the 1790s consistently imagine friendship's 'sacred Title' as a self-consciously manly love. Coleridge's 'Effusion 16, To an Old Man', first published in *Poems* (1796), suggests how the human mediation of divine love in social relations entailed a more

[44]

complex gender politics. [11] Such issues are raised in the speaker's encounter with a debilitated old man, which Coleridge represents as imitating the actions of Jesus,

the GALILÆAN mild,
Who met the Lazars turn'd from rich men's doors,
And call'd them Friends, and heal'd their noisome Sores!
(ll. 12-14)

Jesus's love manifests itself through his attention to the bodily needs of the outcasts. This the poet imitates by relieving the physical distress of an old man suffering from cold. Coleridge offers him his coat:

My Father! throw away this tatter'd vest
That mocks thy shiv'ring! take my garment—use
A young man's arms! I'll melt these frozen dew
That hang from thy white beard and numb thy breast.
My SARA too shall tend thee, like a Child:
And thou shalt talk, in our fire side's recess,
Of purple Pride, that scowls on Wretchedness.
(ll. 5-11)

In giving the man his coat, the speaker both expresses affection and asserts his manliness by proving himself lusty enough to go without his own clothes. With this gesture the 'Father' becomes the helpless child, and Coleridge and his Sara together introduce a note of parental domesticity as they join to 'melt' and 'tend' him. Such domestic love has a cost. Covered once by the poet's coat, the man is sheltered a second time within the couple's ingle-nook. Drawn into a maternal 'recess' the poet subtly strips the old man of his own manliness.

The ideals of manliness which Coleridge cherishes in this sonnet also helped to shape his friendship with Poole. In their relationship, however, it is Poole whom Coleridge figures as the saviour-friend, with himself often taking the old man's role. Poole's providing Coleridge with a coat (literally so) in 1797 reveals something of their complex frame of reference. In reminding Poole to send the coat, Poole's gift-giving becomes a symbolic act by which a coat is transformed into a divine 'Mantle': 'You shall be my Elijah—& I will most reverentially catch the Mantle, which you have cast off.—Why should not a Bard go tight & have a few neat things on his back? *Ey?—Eh!—Eh!*'. [12] The prosaic coat becomes the prophetic mantle whereby Elijah conferred upon Elisha a 'double portion' of the elder prophet's 'spirit'. [13] Wearing the mantle, Elisha was able to divide the sea and establish himself as a prophet and king.

Coleridge teasingly suggests that, in the same way that ‘the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha’ (2: 15), so Poole’s coat will empower the young poet.

However, Coleridge also betrays a certain testiness about receiving Poole’s charity. His verbal jabs—‘*Eh?—Eh!—Eh!*’—assume a self-assertive persona through which the bard demands the coat as of right. Coleridge seems to protest too much, and to sense an uncomfortable dependency. The poet fights against acknowledging how Poole’s gift-giving may emphasize his weakness and ongoing reliance on the charity of a stronger, less needy man. But elsewhere, Coleridge willingly admits that the relation’s exalted nature heightens his sense of being almost effeminately weak. He declares, 24 September 1796:

The Heart, thoroughly penetrated with the flame of virtuous Friendship, is in a state of glory; but ‘lest it should be exalted above measure, there is given it a Thorn in the flesh.’—I mean, that where the friendship of any person forms an essential part of a man’s happiness, he will at times be pestered by the little jealousies & solitudes of imbecil Humanity.—Since we last parted I have been gloomily dreaming, that you did not leave me as affectionately as you were wont to do..[\[14\]](#)

Ideally, ‘virtuous Friendship’ induces an ecstatic, transcendent state of ‘glory’, in which friends become conscious of the presence of God Himself. In practice, however, Coleridge suggests that a proper awareness of friendship’s spiritual value tends to unman the involved parties, making them morbidly sensitive to any possible diminution of feeling. In the *Britannica*’s terms, Coleridge begins to exhibit an ‘exquisite sensibility’ which is characteristically feminine. He continues by elaborating upon friendship’s potential to feminize the male subject:

Pardon this littleness of Heart—and do not think the worse of me for it. Indeed my Soul seems so mantled & wrapped round by your Love & Esteem, that even a dream of losing but the smallest fragment of it makes me shiver—as tho’ some tender part of my Nature were left uncovered & in nakedness. (I 235)

Poole’s affection consists of his charitable provision of an emotional cloak. This mantle warms a deprived individual unable to clothe himself through his inner resources. In his vulnerable nakedness Coleridge figures himself as an infant, and Poole, by extension, as a mother-figure. Again, Coleridge’s child-like condition represents a feminine position, expressing itself through a heightened sensibility whereby even the ‘dream’ of losing the ‘smallest fragment’ of Poole’s love produces a physical ‘shiver’ of anxious feeling.

In practice, then, the ‘sacred’ friendship Coleridge and Poole enjoy genders the friends in various conflicting ways. If the marital mode of spiritual brotherhood emphasizes the men’s manly identities, then Poole’s charity creates a maternal relation which empowers the giver and emasculates the receiver. In accepting the ‘mantling’, Coleridge embraces a mode of friendship in which male friends perform roles of a maternal parent and needy child. Coleridge’s resistance marks his adherence to a male relation grounded in equality rather than dependence. These competing modes of male intimacy can help to unlock the nature of the

men's relations at Nether Stowey during 1797-1798, and also account for increasing tensions in their friendship after 1800.

Whilst he was dreaming of the kind of relationship he would enjoy with Poole at Nether Stowey, Coleridge told his friend in November 1796 of his excitement at living in this 'beautiful country', and how it was increased by the prospect of enjoying:

these blessings *near you*, to see you daily, to tell you all my thoughts in their first birth, and to hear your's, to be mingling identities with you, as it were; [...] Thou hast been '*the Cloud*' before me from the day when I left the flesh-pots of Egypt & was led thro' the way of a wilderness—the *cloud*, that hast been guiding me to a land flowing with milk & honey—the milk of Innocence, the honey of Friendship! [\[15\]](#)

As his guiding '*Cloud*', Coleridge again figures Poole as a redemptive figure. As Moses led the Israelites to Canaan, so Poole is bringing Coleridge to the holy land of Nether Stowey. In this sanctified space, friendship will articulate itself by 'mingling identities', a phrase which implies mutual identification, so that each friend takes on the other's character. Questions of gender are latent in this ideal 'mingling'. In telling Poole his thoughts 'in their first birth', Coleridge suggests he will assume a child-like identity so that the friends' *mingling* might encompass a maternal bond. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, the jealous Leontes uses 'mingling' to describe sexual infidelity: 'To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods' (I. ii. 109). 'Mingling identities' can thus also suggest a disturbing eroticized union, resonant of the marital bond between husband and wife.

Once ensconced at Stowey in January 1797, it was this complex idea of 'mingling identities' which Coleridge and Poole attempted to put into practice. Coleridge's 'Dedication. To the Reverend George Coleridge, of Ottery St. Mary, Devon' (1797), composed six months after his arrival at Nether Stowey, reveals how both maternal and marital modes of 'mingling friendship' might be operating between the two friends. [\[16\]](#) Coleridge explains how he actively

[47]

seeks in friendship to re-create original, familial bonds:

Me from the spot where first I sprang to light,
Too soon transplanted, ere my soul had fix'd
Its first domestic loves; and hence through life
Chacing chance-started Friendships.
(ll. 17-20)

The most important of these 'first domestic loves' is the maternal bond, which Coleridge represents through the image of the bower. Coleridge laments the false friends he has known:

some most false,
False and fair-foliag'd as the Manchineel,
Have tempted me to slumber in their shade
E'en mid the storm; then breathing subtlest damps,
Mix'd their own venom with the rain from heaven,
That I woke poison'd!
(ll. 20-30)

Coleridge's reference to the beautifully seductive Manchineel tree reveals his attraction towards embowering figures with feminine characteristics. The maternal friend shelters Coleridge from a hostile, stormy world in which he would otherwise struggle to survive, and he casts himself as an infant passively reliant on the nurturing care of such mother figures. He asserts that divine providence has at last introduced into his life a truly maternal friend. Coleridge gives

all praise to Him
Who gives us all things, more have yielded me
Permanent shelter: and beside one Friend,
Beneath th'impervious covert of one Oak,
I've rais'd a lowly shed, and know the names
Of Husband and of Father.

(ll. 30-35)

Through his metaphor of embowerment Coleridge describes Poole's mode of interaction and the quality of Stowey's geography. Together the 'one Oak' and the 'one Friend' tower over the poet, providing the protection that a mother ideally affords her child.

However, this passage also reveals the bower to be a marital as well as a maternal space. Ostensibly, the oak is a synecdoche for Coleridge and Sara's wedding bower: under the oak's branches the poet has become a 'Husband' and a 'Father'. However, Coleridge not only places himself 'beneath' his 'one Friend' (where the friend is figured as the 'one Oak') but 'beside' him as well. Spatially, the two men are themselves enclosed beneath the embowering tree.

[48]

In this way, Coleridge and Poole inhabit a specifically marital space, and the verse sentence leaves ambiguous whether Coleridge has become 'Husband' to Sara, Poole, or both of them. By resisting the emasculating, maternal mode and placing himself 'beside' his friend within the bower, Coleridge suggests a more equal relationship, but a more marital one. Issues of power and gender are inescapable either way.

The possibility of a conjugal relation here complicates the idea of the men's manly friendship being a spiritual alternative to sexual ties. In depicting Stowey's sacred spot as incorporating a marital bower, Coleridge's verse invites comparison with Adam and Eve's 'blissful bower' in *Paradise Lost* (IV 689-97). For Milton, the bower 'chosen by the sov'reign planter' offers the archetypal location in which 'Innocence' and 'Friendship' coexist with the free expression of sexual feeling. In 'To the Reverend George' Poole himself takes on the role of 'sov'reign planter', providing a bower for Samuel and Sara. However, the ambiguities of Coleridge's verse suggest that the two men might themselves represent a marital couple for whom living together at Stowey obscurely revisits Adam and Eve's Edenic experience.

Physically inhabiting this prelapsarian space inevitably raises questions of eroticism between the male friends. Both contemporaneous and more recent commentators have struggled to characterize Poole and Coleridge's mutual affection. Thomas De Quincey demurely described the Poole of 1804 as 'a stout plain-looking farmer, leading a bachelor life, in a rustic old-fashioned house'.^[17] Poole's plain looks provide De Quincey with a plausible rationale for his 'bachelor life'. Modern critics speculate more openly about Poole's possible homoerotic attachment to Coleridge. 'Coleridge regarded Poole as one of his closest friends', Kathleen Jones remarks, 'and expressed his affection with all the extravagance of his nature. Poole loved Coleridge with an intensity and possessiveness that lead one to

suspect a more passionate attachment'.^[18] Poole characteristically addresses Coleridge as 'MY DEARLY BELOVED',^[19] and as Elizabeth Mavor notes, the appellation 'Beloved' carried in this period 'about the same weight [...] as "Darling."' ^[20] For Jones, Poole's homoerotic attachment reveals itself most clearly in his pain at Wordsworth's growing 'ascendancy over Coleridge' from 1798 (p. 107).

But Jones underplays the sensibility of Coleridge's own letters. Addressing Poole from Germany, Coleridge exclaims: 'my Friend, my best Friend, my Brother, my Beloved—the tears run down my face—God love you'.^[21] The intensity of Coleridge's feeling blurs the categories of friend, sibling and marital partner. However, as Richard Holmes astutely remarks, 'the freedom

[49]

with which Coleridge expressed emotion to Poole at this period [...] is disconcerting precisely because it contains no homosexual implication, or at least is utterly innocent of any such awareness'.^[22] Holmes's insight is crucial to understanding the Miltonic marriage that Coleridge and Poole enjoy. Like Adam and Eve in Eden, the men's unfallen idea of friendship allows erotic impulses to be expressed while retaining their essential innocence. A Coleridgean expression of homesickness whilst in Germany exemplifies this point:

O my God! how I long to be at home—My *whole Being* so yearns after you, that when I think of the moment of our meeting, I catch the fashion of German Joy, rush into your arms, and embrace you—methinks, my *Hand* would swell, if the whole force of my feeling were crowded there.—Now the Spring comes, the vital sap of my affections rises, as in a tree!^[23]

It is difficult not to interpret either Coleridge's swelling hand or his rising affections as other than overtly erotic images. Coleridge's self-distancing assertion that embracing is 'the fashion of German Joy' indicates his awareness that such Goethian sensibility tests the limits of chaste models of male friendship. However, in troping these priapic impulses as expressions of seasonal energy Coleridge primarily celebrates the heartiness of both Poole and himself, whose physical embrace would affirm the men's virility rather than their homosexuality.

Coleridge also seeks at Stowey to transform the men's friendship into a filial bond between a son and his loving mother. The history of Poole and Coleridge's relationship, however, does not reveal a simple dialectic between a self-consciously manly friendship and an infantilizing maternal relation. The maternal bower which Coleridge associates with Poole's village and the man himself is an ambivalent symbol of friendship. Although it might indeed infantilize Coleridge, it also promises to invigorate his manly identity. Rachel Crawford argues that 'the bower is a literary representation of an enclosed feminized landscape occupied by a woman or female object, or instilled with some feminine principle, usually (but not always) salvational for the masculine hero/poet'. ^[24] As an embowering figure Poole frequently performs this feminine role of providing a 'prop for the poet's emergence into subjectivity' (p. 10).

In Spring 1803, a bed-ridden Coleridge wrote that he was in immediate danger of dying. In reply, Poole invited him to recover in his bookroom in Stowey, in which:

[50]

you may regulate the climate as you like—in which there is even a bed though you cant see it—I promise to get you any books you want—[...] I will take care that neither the cold east wind nor the damp south shall break upon you. [25]

In protecting the sick child from the elements, the Poolean friendship bower becomes a maternal space. Poole regards this not as feminizing, but empowering. He offers Coleridge a fantasy of omnipotence whereby he will ‘regulate the climate’ in the same way Æolus once controlled the winds. Tom Mayberry joins Poole in representing the room as a dynamic space for Coleridge:

A flight of external stairs allowed him easy access to the bookroom, and there he must often have been found when the ‘noise of Women & children’, which made study impossible, had driven him once again from Lime Street: it is probable that most of the poems associated with the cottage were at least partly written in the bookroom.[26]

The dynamism of Poole’s bookroom-bower depends upon its adapting like a good mother to the contours of the poet’s desire. In 1797, its quiet environment is conducive to poetic production. In 1803, Poole believes the room can revive Coleridge’s health through responding sympathetically to his desire for coolness or warmth.

Coleridge had long taken a dynamic view of the sympathetic parental bower. This is revealed in a note, written in a volume of his 1796 *Poems* which he gave to Poole:

My very dear Friend! I send these poems to you with better heart than I should to most others, because I know that you will read them with affection however little you may admire them. I love to shut my eyes, and bring up before my imagination that Arbour, in which I have repeated so many of these compositions to you—Dear Arbour! an Elysium to which I have so often passed by your Cerberus, & Tartarean tan-pits![27]

Conflating his ‘very dear Friend’ with the ‘Dear Arbour’ Coleridge again uses the bower to signify an actual place (the lime-tree bower) and Poole’s parental friendship. Crucially, the bower represents a space free from criticism, excluding all voices external to the poet’s ego. Here Poole’s love is unconditional—he reads his friend’s poems with ‘affection’ irrespective of their worth. Through the sympathy it offers, the bower can invigorate Coleridge and encourage him to re-enter the world with redoubled strength.

[51]

Coleridge compares his visits to Poole’s arbour with Aeneas’ journey to the Elysian fields to meet his father Anchises (which takes him past Cerberus and the Tartarean Pits). As Anchises motivates Aeneas to found Rome, Coleridge suggests, so the sympathy Coleridge receives from his surrogate parent will spur the poet to great literary deeds. Writing to Poole from Shrewsbury in 1798, Coleridge reveals why sympathy should have a empowering rather than merely consolatory effect:

I wish to be at home with you indeed, indeed—my Joy is only in the bud here—I am like that Tree, which fronts me—The Sun shines bright & warm, as if it were summer—but it is not summer & so it shines on leafless boughs. The beings who know how to sympathize with me are my foliage. [28]

As Coleridge's 'foliage', the sympathetic friend acts as an organic power. In the same way that the leaves of a tree enable its growth, so Poole's sympathy is vital for stimulating the poet's natural development.

However, Coleridge was equally aware that Poole's embowering presence at Stowey might constitute a feminine space which could undermine his manly identity, in particular by encouraging a retreat from social action. Such doubts lurk within his 1797 verse epistle to George in a passage detailing life in Poole's bower:

We in our sweet sequester'd Orchard-plot
Sit on the Tree crook'd earth-ward; whose old boughs,
That hang above us in an arborous roof,
Stirr'd by the faint gale of departing May
Send their loose blossoms slanting o'er our heads!
(ll. 57-61)

Ostensibly, the falling May blossoms present Poole's bower as a nurturing, maternal space. However, Coleridge's sedentary posture intimates that the men's friendship is static rather than dynamic. Poole's bower acts as a prop, providing the poet with a supportive seat as well as a protective roof. Coleridge's need for such physical support quietly suggests that the friendship does not invigorate the poet but preserves him from collapse.

The verse-letter ends by suggesting that Poole's sympathetic space provides consolation rather than invigoration. No longer filled with the 'joy of hope' (l. 63) Coleridge's song now sounds 'deeper notes, such as beseech / Or that sad wisdom, folly leaves behind' (ll. 65-66). These notes express a private grief. He tells George that, despite all the affection of his friends,

[52]

at times
My soul is sad, that I have roam'd through life
Still most a Stranger, most with naked heart
At mine own home and birth-place.
(ll. 39-42)

Likewise, he admits that within the bower,

tis to me an ever-new delight,
My eager eye glist'ning with mem'ry's tear,
To talk of thee and thine.
(ll. 51-53)

Behind Coleridge's 'delight' is an ongoing sense of estrangement from the Ottery Coleridges. Implicitly, Poole's arbour can merely offer Coleridge consolation for such loss.

Coleridge's vision of Poole's 'sweet sequestered bower' expresses desire for a retreat from public life and for a sympathetic mode of maternal friendship not primarily concerned with affirming his manly identity. For both men, this maternal mode offers an opportunity of realizing a feminine self, which expresses itself through the signs of sensibility. Both men extol friendship's generation of unrestrained feelings as part of a sympathetic converse. In an

early poetic celebration of his friend, Poole commiserates Coleridge's recent alienation from Southey:

And then I mark the starting tear that steals
Adown thy cheek, when of a friend thou speak'st,
Who erst, as thou dost say, was wondrous kind,
But now, unkind, forgets—I feel and weep. [29]

Coleridge sheds tears and Poole weeps effusively. Poole's sentimental lack of restraint strives to demonstrate affection to Coleridge in a way which many, including the *Britannica*, would regard as feminine.

Sympathetic tears signify one friend's unquestioning confirmation of the other's viewpoint: Coleridge's recent estrangement from Southey has been 'as thou dost say'—Southey's fault. In a letter to Poole sent from Germany, October 1798, Coleridge links such friendly identification to a feminine sensibility:

My spirit is more feminine than your's—I cannot write to you without tears / and I know that when you read my letters, and when you talk of me, *you* must often 'compound with misty eyes'—. May God preserve me for your friendship, and make me worthy of it! [30]

[53]

Although celebrating his more exquisite sensibility, Coleridge validates Poole as a 'feminine' friend, who is also moved to tears when reading or talking of Coleridge. The men's unity of feeling is expressed in the image of one man's tears mirroring those of the other.

It is here that the maternal mode of sentimental friendship conflicts with Coleridge and Poole's marital relationship. To Henrietta Warwick, 6 February 1796, Poole imagines himself amending Coleridge's impractical habits:

People of genius ought imperiously to command themselves to think *without* genius of the common concerns of life. If this be impossible—happy is the genius who has a friend ever near of *good sense*, a quality distinct from genius, to fill up by his advice the vacuity of his character. Indeed I think a good book might be written entitled Advice to Men of Genius. (I 134)

Poole here is not a sympathizer but an adviser, who displays friendship by offering a more objective view of Coleridge's nature than would be possible for a sympathizing friend. Within the advice-giving scenario, male friends assume the conventional gender roles of a conjugal pair. The advisee becomes feminized as a passive receptacle whose 'vacuous' character needs filling by a male input in order to become embodied. Coleridge himself figures Poole's influence as a solid substance at the heart of his being, declaring in 1798 that Poole is 'so consolidated with myself that I seem to have no occasion to speak of him out of myself'. [31] Poole implicitly figures his friendship in the Miltonic terms of the rational Adam's relation to the fanciful Eve, who without her husband's guidance remains open to transgressive thoughts (V. 30-108). For Milton, reason is needed to guarantee that the lawlessness of feminine imagination is not translated into sinful acts, and it is Adam's rational, manly advice which restrains Eve's transgressive impulses.

However, within Coleridge and Poole's marital mode there is space for both friends to correct each other, and adopt the Adamic role. In 1800 Coleridge characterizes the relationship in terms of the men's mutually corrective qualities:

We were well suited for each other—my animal Spirits corrected his inclinations to melancholy; and there was some thing both in his understanding & in his affection so healthy & manly, that my mind freshened in his company, and my ideas & habits of thinking acquired day after day more of substance & reality. [32]

Again, Coleridge plays Eve to Poole's Adam. As Adam literally gave

[54]

'Substantial life' (IV. 485) to Eve, so Poole's friendship provides manly 'substance & reality' to correct Coleridge's effeminate, ungrounded thoughts. Coleridge confirms his friend's belief that advice-giving confers manliness upon the feminized advisee. But Coleridge asserts that he can also be a manly friend, his animal spirits correcting Poole's tendency towards 'melancholy'. Here Poole is implicitly enervated by indulging in a Wertherian sensibility. Periodically, Coleridge did perform this advisory role. Commiserating the death of Poole's mother, Coleridge refuses to offer expressions of 'tenderness & sympathy':

In truth minds, like mine & (in it's present mood) your's too, require to be *braced* rather than *suppled*. [...] I cannot too earnestly impress upon you the solemn Duty, you owe to yourself, your fellow-men, & your maker, to exert your faculties. [33]

Here Coleridge possesses the manly substance that Poole needs. His 'bracing' advice provides his friend with a structure within which Poole can fix thoughts which might otherwise dissolve into an emotional miasma.

Clearly, there is no reason why one man cannot be both an advising and a sympathizing friend. 'Write to me all things about yourself', Coleridge declares, 'where I can not advise, I can console—and communication, which doubles joy, halves Sorrow'. [34] Nevertheless, in practice the men's corrective mode of friendship does not easily coexist with Coleridge's demands for maternal sympathy. In 1800, Coleridge's irregularity in corresponding makes Poole fear he was 'acquiring the *heart-withering* faculty of losing men's *hearts* though I retained their *heads*': 'I must and will endeavour to rectify it, and when I see errors and inconsistencies in those whom I love, where I can't sympathise I will at any rate be silent'. [35] In October 1801, Coleridge's difficulty in accepting the feminine role of advisee threatens an open quarrel. Poole's refusal to fund Coleridge's trip to the Azores triggers an acrimonious denigration of corrective friendship. Coleridge tells Poole that an adviser resembles a 'poor Idiot boy', thereby stripping the advising friend of his manly authority. [36] In Coleridge's next letter, the conflict between advising and sympathetic modes of friendship becomes explicit:

As to myself, advice from almost any body gives me pleasure, because it informs me of the mind & heart of the adviser—but from a very very dear Friend it has occasionally given me great pain [...]—on his account alone—or, *if* on my own, on my own only as a disruption of that sympathy, in which Friendship has it's Being. A thousand people might have advised all that you did, and I might have been pleased; but

it [was] the *you you* part of the Business that afflicted me. [37]

In criticizing the '*you you* part of the Business' Coleridge attacks what Poole regards as a central quality of a friend—his capacity to view another man objectively in order to improve him. Instead, Coleridge aligns friendship with its feminine, sympathetic mode, which seeks to lessen between friends the alienating sense of 'I' and 'you'.

Coleridge's letter reveals his increasing difficulty in these years in sustaining a manly mode of male intimacy. Convalescing from illness in 1801, Coleridge attempts to re-affirm to Poole the characteristically masculine quality of their marital mode: 'It mingles with the pleasures of convalescence, with the breeze that trembles on my nerves, the thought how glad you will be to hear that I am striding back to my former health with such manful paces'. [38] However, Coleridge cannot sustain this manly, purposive self-image. Mentioning a new prospective 'Work', he quickly re-asserts his desire for Poole's maternal friendship:

O my dear dear Friend! that you were with me by the fireside of my Study here, that I might talk it over with you to the Tune of this Night Wind that pipes it's thin doleful climbing sinking Notes like a child that has lost it's way and is crying aloud, half in grief and half in the hope to be heard by it's Mother. (II 669)

Coleridge identifies himself with the lost 'child' and Poole with the comforting 'Mother'. Coleridge desires again to retreat into the embowered, fireside recess he had celebrated in the sonnet 'To an Old Man'. But in 1801 it is Coleridge who needs to be tended, 'like a Child'. The child's crying hovers between 'grief' and 'hope'. The ambivalence suggests that Poole's maternal role also remains poised between offering Coleridge consolation and, more dynamically, hope of recovery. However, the doleful notes of the 'Night Wind' ominously foreshadow 'the dull sobbing Draft, that drones and rakes' (l. 6) through 'A Letter to—' (1802). [39] It suggests the advent of a dejection of spirit that neither Poole's maternal nor marital modes of friendship would allay.

[1] Coleridge - Poole, [15 September 1798]; *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-1971), I 415.

[2] OED, s.v. 'involve', v. 1.

[3] Thomas McCarthy, *Relationships of Sympathy: The Writer and the Reader in British Romanticism* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 98-99.

[4] *Encyclopædia Britannica; or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature*, 18 vols (Dublin: J. Moore, 1790-1797), VII 467-76

[5] Coleridge - Poole, [7 October 1795] (CL I 160).

[6] Poole - Coleridge, 10 October 1795; Mrs Henry Sandford, *Thomas Poole and his Friends*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1888), I 121-22.

[7] Poole - Coleridge, 26 September 1796 (Sandford I 160-61).

[8] For discussion of this traditional view of male friendship, see Jeffrey Richards, "'Passing the love of women:" Manly Love and Victorian Society', in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. by J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 92-122.

- [9] Coleridge - Poole, [16 March 1801] (CL II 707).
- [10] Poole - Coleridge, 25 May 1803 (British Library, Add. MS 35343, fol. 330r-v).
- [11] Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson; Bristol: J. Cottle, 1796), p. 61.
- [12] Coleridge - Poole, [?26] July 1797 (CL I 338).
- [13] 2 Kings, 2: 9.
- [14] Coleridge - Poole, 24 September 1796 (CL I 235).
- [15] Coleridge - Poole, 5 November [1796] (CL I 249).
- [16] *Poems, by S. T. Coleridge, Second Edition. To which are Now Added Poems by Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd* (Bristol: J. Cottle; London: Messrs Robinson, 1797), pp. vii-xii.
- [17] Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. by David Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 35.
- [18] Kathleen Jones, *A Passionate Sisterhood: The Sisters, Wives and Daughters of the Lake Poets* (London: Virago, 1998), p. 107.
- [19] Poole - Coleridge, [January 1798] (Sandford I 259).
- [20] Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), p. 96.
- [21] Coleridge - Poole, 28 September 1798 (CL I 418).
- [22] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 125.
- [23] Coleridge - Poole, 6 May 1799 (CL I 490).
- [24] Rachel C. Crawford, 'The Romantic Subject and the Poetry of the Bower: Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1989), p. 9.
- [25] Poole - Coleridge, 25 May 1803 (British Library, Add. MS 35343, fol. 330v, unpublished in full).
- [26] Tom Mayberry, *Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992), p. 69.
- [27] Coleridge - Poole, 11 April 1796 (CL I 204).
- [28] Coleridge - Poole, [27 January 1798] (CL I 381).
- [29] 'Hail to thee Coldridge, youth of various powers!', 12 September 1795 (Sandford I 125-26 (p. 126)).
- [30] Coleridge - Poole, 26 October 1798 (CL I 430).
- [31] Coleridge - Cottle, [7 March 1798] (CL I 391).
- [32] Coleridge - Josiah Wedgwood, 1 November 1800 (CL I 643-44).
- [33] Coleridge - Poole, 5 October 1801 (CL II 763-64).
- [34] Coleridge - Poole, 5 November [1796] (CL I 251).
- [35] Poole - Coleridge, 21 January 1800 (Sandford II 3).
- [36] Coleridge - Poole, 5 October 1801 (CL II 764).
- [37] Coleridge - Poole, 21 October 1801 (CL II 770).
- [38] Coleridge - Poole, 1 February 1801 (CL II 668).
- [39] The Cornell Manuscript, *Coleridge's 'Dejection': The Earliest Manuscript and the Earliest Printings*, ed. by Stephen Maxfield Parrish (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 106-31.