

The Eolian Harp

Paul Cheshire

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[This article has been modified for online publication as follows:

1. The original included images of the *Rugby Manuscript* Folios 26r – 28r. Internet publication of these has not been authorised by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre and textual references to these have also been removed.
2. The double underlining that occurs in Coleridge's MS versions of the poem is not supported by browsers and has consequently been converted to small capitals in this text.
3. The foldout showing the six successive versions of *The Eolian Harp* which is the foundation of this article was 23" X 14" which makes browser viewing less than satisfactory, and printing a challenge. Offprints of the original foldout are available on application. [CLICK HERE FOR ONLINE VERSION OF FOLDOUT](#)

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Samuel Palmer, Sketchbook, 1824, © British Museum

*And thus, my Love! as on the midway Slope
Of yonder Hill I stretch my limbs at noon
And tranquil muse upon Tranquillity*

Introduction [\[1\]](#)

Setting out successive versions of *The Eolian Harp* [\[2\]](#) on a large single page shows the evolution of the poem in a clearer way than can be achieved by using footnotes or by printing the versions on succeeding pages. We see the growth of the poem from the prothalamial celebration of the seventeen line *Draft 1* [\[3\]](#) to a dramatisation of the three contending aspects of Coleridge—the lover

who is anticipating domestic contentment; the philosopher who is approaching a vision of the One; the Christian who holds such philosophising “vain” and “never guiltless” unless it is subordinated to reverence and obedience to God. At the level of poetic craftsmanship, we see lines improved, lines refusing to come right and, in lines 40-46 of *Draft 2*, the discarding of a key philosophical passage that will not blend into the musical language of the poem. Although we can choose to see this sequence as a demonstration of Coleridge’s skill in improving his work through revision, the view I am urging is of the whole sequence as a single kinetic metapoem, whose very changes are a form of poetry.

Layout and Textual Sources

The decision to print corresponding lines in parallel has necessarily led to one distortion—the gaps left where lines have been cancelled or added obscure the stanza or paragraph breaks. To clarify this, the spaces between lines are shaded where no space was intended, thus any remaining white space indicates an intentional gap.[\[4\]](#) The text of *1803*, a slimmed down version I particularly want to champion, suffers as a result. There are no spaces at all in the original, and it suffers in the interests of the overall scheme in much the same way as Mercator’s projection of the globe onto a flat sheet of paper can lead the unwary to believe that Greenland is nearly as big as the USA. My reason for keeping the lines in parallel rows is to show clearly where the additions and subtractions of lines have occurred. For example, the gap left by the cancellation of lines 40-46 of *Draft 2* is emphasised by this layout, raising the question of whether the *One Life* passage added for *1817* (lines 26-29) was in some way a replacement for those lost lines. I have departed from this line-for-line rule in one case only: the sequence of lines 50-55 of *Draft 2*, was rearranged by Coleridge for *1796*, and it seems fairer to *Draft 2* to present these lines in the order in which they were written rather than rearrange them to match their subsequent repositioning.

The version of *The Eolian Harp* printed in *Poems 1797* has been omitted because there are no verbal changes to *1796*; the only significant change is the removal of the stanza break which occurs in *1796* between lines 44 and 45. This change is significant because it gives authority to a similar layout in *1803*, the version where, as I shall discuss later, Coleridge’s editorial involvement has been questioned. I have also omitted a number of subsidiary manuscript versions,[\[5\]](#) and in particular the five lines in CN I 51 which are clearly precursors of lines 23-27 of *Draft 2*:

Light cargoes waft of modulated Sound

[3]

From viewless Hybla brought, when Melodies
Like Birds of Paradise on wings, that aye
Disport in wild variety of hues,
Murmur around the honey-dropping flowers. [\[6\]](#)

The printed sources for the version compiled here are noted below. [7] The *Rugby Manuscript* needs some explanation. This is a collection of loose leaf autograph manuscripts that Coleridge provided for Joseph Cottle, containing early drafts of poems and prefaces for the editions of his poems published by Cottle in April 1796 and October 1797. [8] The *Rugby Manuscript*, which is now in the possession of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre at the University of Texas at Austin, received its name during the long period when it was owned by Rugby School. *Draft 1* and *Draft 2* were first transcribed from the *Rugby Manuscript* and published by E. H. Coleridge in 1912. [9] The *Rugby Manuscript* also includes a third draft of *The Eolian Harp* but this is not substantially different to the version published in 1796. [10]

In 1973 P. J. Croft published a superior transcription of *Draft 2* lines 26-62 with a facsimile reproduction of the corresponding folios 27v and 28 from the *Rugby Manuscript*. [11] Croft rightly castigates E. H. Coleridge for “seriously inaccurate” transcriptions; Croft’s corrections are a clear improvement and I have relied on them: see for example his amendment of “from” to “form” in line 44. And in the same lines:

Shrill Discords and most soothing Melodies,
Harmonious form Creation’s vast concént?

(43-44 my underlining)

the sandwiching of a noun between adjectives (“soothing Melodies, /Harmonious”) and the way, reading “form” as a verb, the syntax pivots

[4-5]

around “harmonious” is surely a beautiful Miltonism. [12] In my transcription of the cancelled passage of *Draft 2* lines 40-46 I have aimed to show the lines which were first written by Coleridge, and have followed Croft’s transcription of these as amended by J.C.C. Mays. I have also provided a detailed transcription, again relying on these two scholars who have both inspected the original manuscript, to set out the amendments Coleridge made to this passage (see transcript).

Transcript

Rugby MS Draft 2

Folio 27v: crossed out first attempt at lines 40-46

Heights so hung,

40 [And all] <in *altered to*> In diff'rent [stations] aptly [plac'd] that All

[For] In half-heard

41 [So]<that *altered to*>[That] [the low] Murmurs and loud Bursts sublime,

42 Shrill Discords and most soothing Melodies

- Raise one Concert
- 43 Creation's] great [harmonious Concert form?]
- 44 Thus God the only universal Soul,
- Mechaniz'd Matter Organic
- 45 [Organiz'd Body] [is] the [Instrument,] Harps,
- 46 And each one's Tunes are that, which each calls I.—

Breeze.

Transcription:

Following P. J. Croft, *Autograph Poetry in the English Language*, London: Cassell, 1973, p98, with amendment proposed by Jim Mays: line 41 *supra* “For” for “On”; In line 43 Mays proposes “form’d” for “form?”, but to me the latter seems preferable in that it maintains the present tense.

I have chosen rather arbitrarily to end the sequence with the version published in 1834. This was the last edition of the *Poetical Works* published in Coleridge’s lifetime and is the one adopted as authoritative by E. H. Coleridge for his edition of the poems. 1834 was prepared by Henry Nelson Coleridge who, according to Jim Mays, undoubtedly instigated both the expansion of apostrophes into spelled-out past participles, and the removal of capitals.[\[13\]](#) Apart from the elegant amendment of Music from neuter to feminine in line 34, the poem had thus reached its final form by 1817 when *Sibylline Leaves* was published.

The full textual history of *The Eolian Harp* will become much clearer on the publication of Jim Mays’ forthcoming edition of Coleridge’s *Poetical Works* as Volume 16 of the *Collected Works*. This much needed and long awaited edition will record for *The Eolian Harp*, “six manuscripts (or bits of manuscripts), seven printed texts, two proof copies and twelve annotated copies of printed versions”.[\[14\]](#) Presenting all this material in the way I am undertaking would necessitate a single sheet of Bayeux Tapestry dimensions. The six version layout printed here is intended to offer the reader a quick reference to the *key* compositional stages of the poem.

Reference should also be made here to Jack Stillinger’s *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* [\[15\]](#). He has identified sixteen different versions of *The Eolian Harp*, and provides text and apparatus for these, apologising for the fact that while he talks of multiple versions he has been forced by the constraints of book production to present each poem as single standard text with an apparatus to show variant readings. “I am

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thus”, he writes, “in this book both arguing strenuously against the single-text ideal and, in my machinery of texts and apparatuses, inevitably contributing to the reinforcement of just such an ideal” (26). The book contains a detailed analysis of the textual variations and of Coleridge as reviser. A very strong case is also made for the theory of textual

pluralism which holds that “each version of a work embodies a separate authorial intention that is not necessarily the same as the authorial intention in any other version of the same work” (119). Jack Stillinger’s work is invaluable and will stand as the fullest account of textual variants of *The Eolian Harp* until the publication of Jim Mays’ *Collected Works* edition mentioned above. There are, however, as will be explained below, compelling reasons to disagree with him over the dating of *Draft 2*.

Rugby MS Draft 1

This simple 17 line evening effusion lays the foundation for the subsequent developments and antinomies, with lines 1–12 surviving in essence and mood throughout the poem’s development. The final 5 lines where the harp first appears (whose metaphorical use is changed in subsequent versions and made pivotal to a very different poem) here offer a contrasting mood to the initial impression of static repose, but one still in keeping with the prothalamial theme. Coleridge the great anticipator was here celebrating his first visit, with Sara, to the cottage at Clevedon where they were to move after their marriage some six weeks later. Miltonic allusions abound: the cot with its myrtle and jasmine mirrors Adam and Eve’s wedding bower, and “the coy maid half-willing to be woo’d”, who arouses male desire through resistance, echoes Eve’s “sweet reluctant amorous delay” (IV 310-11) which so delighted Adam. We are being reminded of Milton’s celebration and vigorous defence of the sexual expressions of unfallen married love in *Paradise Lost*.

Coleridge, anticipating marriage with Sara, is at last able to experience and express sexual desire as a divinely sanctioned marriage sacrament. Sexual guilt and the dark age of the Cambridge brothels^[16] is part of a tempestuous past, a past from which he is now freed: he is having a foretaste of wife and home to be, a haven where “The stilly murmur of the far off sea” reflects his new sense of tranquillity.^[17] The draft feels unfinished because of the short final line, but as a fragment it has great charm. There is already a slight hint of “faery” in the

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way the Harp is anticipated: “In the half-closed window we *will* place the Harp” (emphasis added). The expression of a wish makes the Harp appear on the scene, as an object physical enough to be caress’d and to utter “sweet upbraidings” in the present indicative tense, as if the act of willing it to be there has made it present.

Rugby MS Draft 2

Dating

Although we may not be able to date the writing of this draft exactly, we can be sure that it precedes the version published in April 1796. There are compelling reasons to disagree with Jack Stillinger who considers that this draft was written between April and November 1796 as a revision to 1796 (*op. cit.* 29-30: in his scheme it is called *Version 5*). His arguments in support of this dating are not at all convincing. First, the pantheistic sentiments expressed by Coleridge in letters to Thelwall dated late 1796 are

too vague to be linked (as they are by Stillingner) to a contemporaneous poetic working of the pantheistic lines 40-46 of *Draft 2*, and furthermore, Coleridge's letter to Thelwall of 31 December 1796 quotes lines 36-39 of the 1796 published version of *The Eolian Harp* (give or take italics and capitals) rather than the equivalent lines from what Stillingner claims to be the version Coleridge has just composed (CL I 294). It is possible that Stillingner has been misled by the "p.96" written after "Effusion" on the heading (see facsimile of folio 47r) which clearly could not have been written before April 1796 when *Poems on Various Subjects* was published, 96 being the page-number of the poem in both the 1796 edition, and in the Second Edition, *Poems*, 1797. However, the manuscript as written by Coleridge is in fact headed simply "Effusion"; ", p.96" has clearly been added later in pencil by another hand—it has nothing to do with Coleridge's text, and quite probably was not even written in his lifetime. I am also informed by Jim Mays that the paper type on which these lines are written is identical to the paper on which other material for the surrounding poems in the 1796 volume was submitted.

Nor does the Stillingner dating make sense if we look at the sequence of development; the version of *The Eolian Harp* published in October 1797 in the Second Edition of Coleridge's *Poems* (op.cit.) shows no sign of any substantial revision from 1796. It is possible to believe that Coleridge, subsequent to publishing the poem in April 1796, wrote out a MS version of it adding the pantheistic passage of lines 40-46, which he later decided to retract, but it beggars belief that he would have chosen to cut from this new draft, the two sublime lines 28-29: "Whilst thro' my half-clos'd eyelids I behold / The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main".

Text (Draft 2)

After the Harp's music has been allowed to play on our senses from lines 17-27, the poem takes off in a new direction presenting a fine example of Dr

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Johnson's definition of Metaphysical poetry, by which the poet "perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love".[\[18\]](#) The scene of the first part (lines 1—27) takes place in the evening; the second part beginning on line 28 "And thus, my Love!" to line 46, is set at midday, but only in the sense of the poet describing to Sara how his present transports are reminding him of more solitary and philosophical day-time reveries. The significance of the contrasting evening and midday moods for Coleridge may be explained by a letter he wrote to John Prior Estlin dated 4 July 1796: "I would write Odes & Sonnets Morning & Evening—& metaphysicize at Noon." (CL I 223)

The first part (lines 1—27) is an evening effusion which follows the harp's music of *Draft 1* into a "faery" passage which Coleridge found hard to get right. On the manuscript (see Rugby MS 27r) we can see below line 24 the top of a deleted line that has been cut off at the bottom of the page. (Judging by the size of the paper used for folio 28 there would have been room for two lines here). We can make out "ambrosial"

as an amendment above this lost line, but otherwise the contents of the line seem irrecoverable. This “faery” passage, as we shall see, was substantially reworked for 1796.

The second section of the poem, after the stanza break at line 27, starts with the poet stretched out on “the midway Slope / Of yonder Hill”. This Samuel Palmer figure reclining in the landscape, lost in thought, is a true Romantic icon, depicted in a fine early example of the natural spoken language that made Coleridge’s *Conversation Poems* such an exciting re-definition of poetic style. The poet’s “indolent and passive” mind then entertains eleven lines of metaphysical “Phantasies”:

And what if All of animated Life
Be but as Instruments diversly fram'd
That tremble into thought, while thro' them breathes
One infinite and intellectual Breeze?
And all in different Heights so aptly hung,
That Murmurs indistinct and Bursts sublime,
Shrill Discords and most soothing Melodies,
Harmonious form Creation's vast concént?
Thus GOD would be the universal Soul;
Mechaniz'd matter as th'organic harps,
And each one's Tunes be that, which each calls I.—
(Draft 2, 36-46)

The unusual word “concént” is of interest. It is not a spelling variation on “consent” but a musical term, derived from *concinere*—sing together, whose use is

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first recorded in the 16th Century.[\[19\]](#) This same word occurs in Milton’s *At a Solemn Music*, a poem about world harmony (*musica mundana*) as a link with the divine. In this poem Milton urges “Voice and Verse” to present “to our high-raised phantasy”:

That undisturbed song of pure concent
Ay sung before the sapphire-coloured throne
To him that sits thereon [\[20\]](#)

The relevance of this poem to Coleridge’s “vast concént” passage becomes apparent when Milton goes on to express the wish:

That we on earth with undiscording voice
May rightly answer that melodious noise;
As once we did, till disproportioned sin
Jarred against nature’s chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed
In perfect diapason, whilst they stood

In first obedience and their state of good. [\[21\]](#)

If Coleridge *was* thinking of *At a Solemn Music* when he used this term, his theological construction of the world harmony could hardly be more different; Milton's God remains firmly separate in his transcendent heaven, being hymned by his creatures: He is no "universal Soul" playing on "organic harps".

Coleridge's idea of "Creation's vast concént" can usefully be compared with a passage from Maximus of Tyre, a Platonist writer he is known to have admired while at Cambridge:

Imagine instead that this whole universe of ours is a harmony like that of a musical instrument, with God as the craftsman, and the harmony itself beginning from him and spreading through air and earth and sea and animals and plants, then falling on to a great disparate mass of natural substances and bringing an end to the strife that rages among them—just as the notes sung by the leader of a choir, pervading the many voices of the choristers, bring order to their discord. [\[22\]](#)

Maximus and Coleridge both represent creation as a harmonious unity of

[10]

sympathetic correspondence emanating from the One, but the differences between their views are instructive. Maximus' formulation is of God bringing a unifying harmony onto a previously chaotic and warring world. For Coleridge however, even "Shrill discords" are a part of "Creation's vast concént": apparent evils are not necessarily to be ameliorated by God, but are God's agents of spiritual edification. [\[23\]](#)

Coleridge's Unitarian belief system at this time had two key dogmas—*Optimism* and *Necessitarianism*. *Optimism*, born of a belief that an omnipotent God could not create anything that was not good, forces Coleridge in *Religious Musings* to characterise tyrannical scourges of humanity as "Teachers of Good thro' Evil, by brief wrong / Making truth lovely" (195-196). [\[24\]](#) By introducing phrases such as "mechaniz'd matter", Coleridge is also showing signs of the *Necessitarianism* he adhered to at the time. Coleridge saw the "sole operant" God (ibid. 56) as playing on passive organic life according to the Hartleyan principles which explain all actions as determined by the law of association. Coleridge's Unitarianism at times seemed to be a personal synthesis of these two key ideas, as pithily expressed in a zealous letter he wrote to Southey in 1794: "I would ardently, that you were a Necessitarian—and (believing in an all-loving Omnipotence) an Optimist" (CL I 145). He then went on later in the same letter to write that: "Lamb... like me is a Unitarian Christian and an Advocate for the Automatism of Man.—" (CL I 146).

Coleridge recognised that he had trouble turning these metaphysical ideas into poetry: the two attempts at lines 40-46, are more effective when in 1796 they are condensed into the one line "At once the Soul of each, and God of all?" Coleridge has realised that he is repeating himself and that by incorporating the phrase "organic

harps” in line 37 of *1796* he has already said everything he was struggling to say in lines 40-46 of *Draft 2*. Nevertheless, lines 44-46 of the latter give us a useful gloss on what Coleridge meant:

Thus GOD would be the universal Soul;
Mechaniz'd matter as th'organic harps,
And each one's Tunes be that, which each calls I—

The final section, lines 47-62, Coleridge's Christian repentance, has seemed overdone to some critics, and playfully self-mocking to others. One thing is certain—the “meek daughter of Christ” passage was not altered

[11]

substantially by Coleridge in later drafts other than to tidy up phrasing and rearrange some lines. It suited Coleridge's sense of internal division, and allows the poet to return to harmony with “PEACE and this COT, and THEE, my best belov'd!” which is the scene of the beginning. The cycle of the poem is fundamentally Coleridgean: fulfilled emotional union with the loved one gives rise to the romantic breeze of inspiration; the soul takes wing and flies into metaphysical vision; then suddenly comes a feeling of sinfulness, a feeling that he may be punished for these “shapings of the unregenerate mind”, whereupon the “unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths”[\[25\]](#) are apparently deeply repented. We may read this as a Coleridgean psychic fault line, but as John Beer points out (CV 28-29), the split between the Christian religion with its Hebrew roots and emphasis on Revelation, and philosophy with its Greek roots and emphasis on enquiry, is a problem inherent to our culture: consider Francis Bacon who, in 1605, wrote of:

The extreme prejudice which both religion and philosophy hath received and may receive by being commixed together; as that which undoubtedly will make an heretical religion, and an imaginary and fabulous philosophy.[\[26\]](#)

Coleridge took on the task of trying to integrate these modes of sensibility, rather than decide between them. We can contrast this aspect of Coleridge to Yeats who used a theory of division into self and anti-self as a means to poetry. When Yeats writes that poetry comes “[out] of the quarrel with ourselves”[\[27\]](#), his particular “quarrel” can seem like comfortable aesthetic play: something of a phoney war, compared with the range of sensibilities that Coleridge struggled to embrace. Yeats, fundamentally intuitive and anti-rational, was comfortable in his divisions; unlike Coleridge, he felt no need to integrate science or Christianity into his world view.[\[28\]](#)

It is important to recognise that in this poem, unlike in the *Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge allows the protagonist to achieve the grace of *genuine* repentance: the “Faith that inly feels” (58). For the Mariner, salvation is not achieved through recognising the

need to pray: prayer is not within his volition—in spite of his efforts it is a grace he cannot achieve:

I look'd to Heaven, and try'd to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made

[12]

My heart as dry as dust. (236-39) [\[29\]](#)

i.e. without the prayerful *feeling* (which is not within his voluntary control) prayers turn to dust. This psychological struggle allows even the non-Christian reader to empathise with the Mariner's later experience of salvation. The repentance achieved so effortlessly in *The Eolian Harp* makes for a happy ending but, for most readers, the fact that it comes easily strikes a note of false optimism. Coleridge's most successful poetic evocations of religious feeling are those where salvation is being *fought* for. [\[30\]](#)

However we choose to respond to this section, it clearly carried a deep emotional charge for Coleridge the Christian. The line "Thou biddest me walk humbly with my God!" is adapted from *Micah* 6:8, a scriptural passage later quoted by Coleridge in *The Friend* in a vehement refutation of the liberal view that if Christianity does not accept that "all religions are equally pleasing to the God of all" it is a "less humane and philosophic creed" than Hinduism. Christianity, he writes, is

...that religion, which commands us that we have no fellowship with the works of darkness but to reprove them;—... that religion which strikes the fear of the Most High so deeply, and the sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin so inwardly, that the believer anxiously enquires: [quoting Micah 6:7-8] *Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* —and which makes answer to him,—*He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and walk humbly with thy God?* (FI 99)

Coleridge's deep "fear of the Most High" is more frightening and consequential than critical jibes about the conclusion's "narrow and governessy" orthodoxy should lead us to expect. [\[31\]](#)

1796

The first published version discards the problematic lines 40-46 of *Draft 2*. We can speculate on whether there is a feeling of caution at expressing too specifically such full blown pantheistic sentiments: if "each [organic harp's] Tunes be that, which each calls I", then God is *specifically* stated to be all living things, but at the time of drafting Coleridge was not so wary: *Religious Musings*

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abounds in descriptions of oneness. Therefore, given that no such caution was evident in *Religious Musings*, the cancellation of these lines is more plausibly explained as an aesthetic decision. The relocation, in the 1796 version, of the expression “organic Harps” to line 37 leads to a less definite statement of the same idea with the poetically more suitable (and Miltonic[\[32\]](#)) “what if” in place of a firm assertion:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversly fram’d,
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,
At once the Soul of each and God of all? (36-40)

The poem also gains the wonderful lines:

Whilst thro’ my half-clos’d eyelids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main (28-29)

Lines 20-27, from “In aery voyage” down to “untir’d wing”, are tidied up. The faery imagery borders on feyness but the music of “Such a soft floating witchery of sound” is enough to make us “half willing to be woo’d” nevertheless.

It is also worth noting that since *Draft 2* Coleridge seems to have recognised the importance to him, and to the poem, of the “faith that inly *feels*” mentioned above. He has not just italicised “*feels*” (line 52) but has added to it the footnote from *Appel a l'impartiale postérité*, which glosses the expression: the atheist may reason better, but he lacks the responsive heart that feels awe. For Coleridge, feeling was a faculty of deep knowing and the Christian in him sensed God as a deep unknowable sublimity, a sublimity intended possibly here to be contrasted, by Burkean pairing, with the bubbles of philosophy that are merely beautiful.

1803

Given the circumstances surrounding the publication of *Poems 1803* it is surprising how firm, decisive and successful the changes to this version are. Coleridge went to London on 15 March 1803, and early during his twenty four day stay, he arranged for Longmans to publish a new edition of his poems. There was talk of a second volume to collect his more recent poems, but Coleridge was more interested in other grand writing projects, and also used

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the non-completion of *Christabel* as an excuse for procrastination.[\[33\]](#) He had several meetings with Lamb over the time he remained in London and took the coach to Keswick on 8 April, leaving no instructions regarding the new edition. Presumably he just viewed it as a further reprint of the 1797 edition of his poems.

Coleridge fell ill during the journey home and spent the next six weeks in bed with what he variously described as influenza and rheumatic fever. He wrote to Poole on 20 May foreseeing his imminent death with the peace of mind of one who has just taken out a £1000 life insurance policy, but worrying about whether his mass of incomplete philosophical notes would be intelligible to a posthumous editor (CL II 944-5). A forthcoming reprint of his poems was not high on his list of priorities at this time. Lamb, clearly desperate at being left in charge, wrote to Coleridge on 20 May about the edition.[\[34\]](#)

Can you send any *wishes* about the book? Longman I think should have settled with you, but it seems you have left it to him. Write as soon as you possibly can, for without making myself responsible, I feel myself in some sort accessory [sic] to the selection, which I am to proof-correct.

But Lamb promised Coleridge in the same letter, “not to alter one word in any poem whatever, but to take your last text, where two are”. In spite of this statement, Lamb did mention (ibid.) that he had unilaterally cut lines, which he considered redundant, from the *Man of Ross*. Also, the fact that the eight lines cut from *The Eolian Harp* for 1803 were reinstated when the poem was next published as 1817, suggests some collaborative influence present in 1803. There is no record of Coleridge’s wishes in the matter—his replies to Lamb have not survived. Tantalisingly, Lamb also mentioned in his letter taking another editorial decision “on Wordsworth’s authority”.[\[35\]](#) Perhaps there was a Wordsworthian influence on these cuts; if we apply the aesthetic of the preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the eight cut lines can be seen as poeticisms superfluous to the poem’s simplicity: line 5, 1796, a gloss pointing out the symbolism of Jasmine and Myrtle; line 8, 1796, attributing emblematic attributes to the evening star; line 13, 1796, the physical placing of the lute; lines 21-5, 1796, the five line elfin passage.[\[36\]](#)

[15]

Amidst all these cuts, four lines are added which seem to be a replacement for (and a great improvement on) the “twilight Elfin” of 1796 and follow on perfectly from the preceding line:

Such a soft floating witchery of sound—
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a World like this,
Where e’en the Breezes of the simple Air
Possess the power and spirit of Melody! (17-21)

The 1803 version reads well; there is a strong case for it as the purest and most coherent and balanced of all the versions of this poem. Reading it through, would anyone wish to reinsert any of the cut lines without pause for thought? If this were the final version, the only certain regret would be the absence of the four lines beginning “O! the one

Life...” which were to be added to 1817. But at this stage, with the five lines “As twilight Elfins...” cut (1796: 21-25), the *One Life* lines would not fit after line 17: “Such a soft floating witchery of sound”, and would have to follow on from line 36: “At once the Soul of each, and God of all?”, i.e., in the gap left by the early pantheistic lines 40-46 of *Draft 2*. The positioning of these lines is important for reasons I shall explain below.

1817

Dating

1817 restores the eight lines cut for 1803 and adds a further mystery in the addition of four new lines (26-29, which I shall refer to as the *One Life* lines) not in the main text but as errata.

O! the one Life, within us and abroad,
Which meets all Motion, and becomes its soul,
A Light in Sound, a sound-like power in Light,
Rhythm in all Thought, and Joyance every where—

The errata then continue with amendments to lines 30-33; the only major change to these lines is the replacement of the old line 33 with: “Is Music slumbering on its instrument!” Coleridge explains the errata in his preface as follows:

In my Literary Life [i.e. *Biographia Literaria*], it has been mentioned that, with the exception of this preface, the

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SIBYLLINE LEAVES have been printed almost two years; and the necessity of troubling the reader with the list of errata, which follows this preface, alone induces me to refer again to the circumstance, at the risk of ungenial feelings, from the recollection of its worthless causes. *A few corrections of later date have been added.* [My emphasis].

It may be difficult to accept without query that lines reflecting the *One Life* philosophy which was most intense in 1798, are “corrections of later date”^[37]. Might the passage not have been written in, say, 1798 but pruned for the pared-down 1803, and hence overlooked in 1815 when the *Sibylline Leaves* poems first went to the printer? The tenor of these lines makes such questions tempting. However, there are many persuasive arguments in favour of an 1817 composition date.

M.H. Abrams in his study of *The Eolian Harp*, concentrates his attention on the additional *One Life* lines and provides a very detailed chronology of the printing stages of *Sibylline Leaves*. He concludes that the list of errata must have been composed between Spring 1816 and May 1817.^[38] Abram’s study also, as we shall see, connects the “Light in Sound” idea convincingly to Coleridge’s philosophical writings and letters

of the years 1816-1819 (Abrams 166). Additionally, a striking parallel has been noted, most recently by John Beer, between Coleridge's errata line 34: "Music slumbering on its instrument", and the image of "might half-slumbering on its own right arm" from Keats' *Sleep and Poetry* which was published in March 1817.^[39] If we accept the late May composition date for the errata, this points to a rapid absorption and response time by Coleridge; however, his retention of "its" from Keats' line, which was amended to the more suitable "her" for his next edition of the poems in 1828, may well be a sign of such o'er hasty assimilation.

Finally, Jim Mays, in researching the source material of the poems exhaustively, has found no sign of earlier drafts of the *One Life* lines 26-29.^[40] We would reasonably expect some traces of these lines to be extant given Coleridge's propensity for annotating and amending printed copies of his poems. In the absence of further documentary evidence, the balance of probability must be that Coleridge did indeed write these errata lines in 1817.

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The One Life

Leaving aside the dating of their composition, the positioning of these *One Life* lines in the poem after the musical "gentle gales from Fairy-Land", indicates that Coleridge is softening any hard metaphysical content by subordinating it to the music of the poem. Lines placed here do not *have* to mean anything (which is not to say that they have no meaning). Their role within the poem is to continue the rising feeling of ecstasy that has been building up in the preceding lines. Indeed, if we break the spell and look at the *logical* sequence of the poem we see that this new idea of the *One Life* has come out of nowhere—it is not reached *logically* until line 44: "And what if all of animated nature...". This was the very place where Coleridge put his 1795 vision of the One, the cancelled pantheistic passage "And all in different heights... which each calls I" (*Draft* 2 40-46), with the result that for the reader, it was arrived at by logical deduction from the "what if" speculation. If these new errata lines can also carry meaning, then Coleridge has achieved here what he was unable to do in 1795: he has blended metaphysics with music.

This quality makes the *One Life* lines hard to analyse whilst remaining in tune with their poetic resonance. As regards the phrase *One Life* itself, although the expression is often used as a label for the visionary pantheism of the Nether Stowey *annus mirabilis* when Coleridge worked in such close conjunction with Wordsworth, the exact phrase does not occur in Coleridge's poetry outside *The Eolian Harp*. In Wordsworth the exact phrase occurs in lines originally written for *The Ruined Cottage* between February and March 1798 which were later incorporated into the 1799 two part Prelude.^[41] It is necessary to give a full extract from this passage if it is to retain its power:

I was only then
Contented when with bliss ineffable

I felt the sentiment of being spread
O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart

...Wonder not

If such my transports were, for in all things
I saw *one life*, and felt that it was joy;
One song they sang and it was audible—
(1799, Part 2, 448-461 - italics added)

Although Wordsworth here identifies the *One Life* more particularly with the external world of Nature, i.e., “abroad” rather than Coleridge’s “within us *and*

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abroad”, it is hard not to hear the same song that is present in Coleridge’s *One Life* lines. Wordsworth’s explicit worship of Nature often causes us to overlook his simultaneous sense of “that one interior life”^[42] which is usually implicit in the same extroverted Nature passages. Certainly we have the fusion of motion and stillness with the ensouling of inanimate objects which Coleridge distils into “Which meets all Motion and becomes its soul”, along with the synaesthesia of “Light in Sound” which matches Wordsworth’s seeing, feeling and hearing the *One Life* in lines 460-461. “Rhythm in all Thought, and Joyance every where—” matches Wordsworth’s “I saw one life, and felt that it was joy”, but again shows Coleridge’s emphasis on the subjective pole of the experience. A state of utmost inspiration is being evoked, where thought is spontaneous poetry; the line “Rhythm in all Thought, and Joyance every where—” evokes the effects of a deep draft of the song-inspiring milk of Paradise from the final stanza of *Kubla Khan*. The inspiration that gives rise to the poem is already the poem, or perhaps (like Coleridge’s complete but unwritten vision of *Kubla Khan* prior to interruption by the person from Porlock) it is the *metapoem* existing on some other plane, fuller and richer than its partial and changing expressions on the page will ever be.

Neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth were able to write of the *One Life* vision without appending a recantation, but they did this in very different ways. Wordsworth's recantation after the *Prelude* passage quoted above reads as follows:

If this be error, and another faith
Find easier access to the pious mind,
Yet were I grossly destitute of all
Those human sentiments which make this earth
So dear if I should fail with grateful voice
To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes...

(1799, Part 2, 465-470)

Wordsworth's sacrifice of the pawn of philosophical justification thus turns into a rhetorical opening that leads on to a reinforcing reprise of his exaltation. Coleridge's recantation of his *One Life* vision at the end of *The Eolian Harp*, is apparently wholehearted within the sequence of the poem, but only as a conscious swing of the pendulum towards one of two co-existent options. It is impossible otherwise to explain how he comes to compose and then insert such enthusiastic *One Life* lines before a passage, already written, which prejudices them as "shaping of the unregenerate mind".

Although Coleridge worked long after 1798 to develop a philosophical system that could accommodate these *One Life* intimations, there is something unique about the Coleridge and Wordsworth Quantock *One Life* period

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between 1797 and 1798. Passages of their poems written at that time portrayed a genuine visionary breakthrough—an experience, apparently shared between them, that pointed towards a way of holding transcendental experience outside the specific dogmas of religion. For a moment, like at the dawn of the French Revolution, everything must have seemed possible, but perhaps the subsequent history of that Revolution offers an analogy of the fragility of such breakthroughs, whether in the sphere of politics or spirituality, when they part so radically from tradition. Wordsworth's greater success at the time in expressing this vision, in *Tintern Abbey*, the *Ruined Cottage* and the early *Prelude* drafts, contributed both to Coleridge's admiration for him as the one destined to write *the* great philosophical poem, and to Coleridge's abandonment of his own poetic ambition to do the same; an ambition very much to the fore earlier when he was writing *Religious Musings* between Christmas Eve 1794 and March 1796.

It is surely a sign of Coleridge's recognition of the value of his earlier visionary period that by inserting these lines, newly written in 1817, into *The Eolian Harp*, he was posting them backwards in time—placing them in the imaginative era of his Somerset years. John Beer has written that at the time of the 1797-1798 *annus mirabilis* Coleridge "had in no way achieved the grand embracing myth ... but for the time being his imagination had seized upon a limited myth which was vivid enough to be an organising framework for poetry" (Beer CV 42). Coleridge increasingly came to see the production of a great metaphysical system as his great task in life and our final task in understanding these lines written in 1817 is to view them in the light of the "grand embracing myth", the world-view, that Coleridge had by then developed.

M.H. Abrams has shown that the concepts underlying Coleridge's *One Life* lines can be traced to studies continuing up to 1817 involving Isaac Newton, Friedrich Schelling and other German *Naturphilosophen*, Boehme, as well as "biblical accounts of the creation and the Incarnation". He also traces convincing verbal parallels in philosophical letters written in 1817-1818 (Abrams 164).[\[43\]](#) For a fuller understanding of Coleridge's system and to follow the supporting arguments leading up to it, it is necessary to read Abrams's work: I am offering here in the following four paragraphs a summary of his summary of Coleridge's metaphysical system and his conclusions. His interpretation is too important to omit and I must run the risk of oversimplification.

Coleridge's system stands in opposition to the Newtonian/Cartesian world-view of divided elementary particles of dead matter presided over by an inactive watchmaker God ("a lifeless Machine whirled about by the dust of its

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own Grinding"[44]), a view which is built on the basic assumption that there is a profound split between mind and matter. Coleridge's is a dynamic philosophy that builds up a universe not from particles of matter but from energies, or powers, that polarise into positive and negative (or *thesis* and *antithesis*) interacting according to the *Law Of Polarity*.

The original unity polarises according to this law into *Light* and *Gravitation*, which are the two basic powers underlying the universe, interacting with each other as opposing forces. These are not the same light and gravity that we experience: *Light* is the principle of contraction and dilation; *Gravitation* is the principle of attraction and repulsion. The powers of *Light* and *Gravitation* evolve, by progressive synthesis, through four distinctive orders of organisation called "potences" which form the universe we know as follows:

- 1: Magnetism, electricity, chemical combination etc.
- 2: All the forms of the inorganic world.
- 3: The organic world from plants to man.
- 4: Mind / Consciousness (arising from man).

Consciousness, by the *Law of Polarity*, counterpoises the outer world as "object" from itself as "subject", or, in Abram's words, "consciousness re-engenders as knowledge the natural world within which it has itself been engendered, and of which it remains an integral part" in order then to synthesise these poles, and thus complete the evolutionary cycle.

The summary conclusion of this system is that all existence, whether material or mental, is evolved from the interactions of *Light* and *Gravitation* and culminates in Mind. What Coleridge means by "The one Life, within us and abroad" can, in this context, thus be seen in two ways: firstly, that there is one source of life, an energy (not a *thing*) which, by the processes of polarisation described above, manifests itself as both matter and as consciousness; and secondly, that the supreme manifestation of that *One Life* is the human consciousness itself which is the instrument of synthesising these two separated halves, the polar opposites of knower and knowledge.

This background helps us to understand Coleridge's letter of 4 July 1817 to Ludwig Tieck in which he states his long-held belief that "Sound was=Light under the præpotence of *Gravitation*" (CL IV 751, cit. Abrams). The underlying sense of "A Light in Sound, a Sound-like power in Light" is thus connected with the idea, not just of synaesthesia as discussed earlier, but also with Coleridge's idea that sound is a modification of *Light*. The interpretation of this line must however go yet deeper. Coleridge, influenced by Boehme, interprets *Genesis* according to his metaphysical scheme. Thus, in the verse: "And God said, Let there be light: and there

was light” (*Genesis* 1:3), Coleridge sees the creation of his *Light*; similarly, the darkness from which God separated the light in the next *Genesis* verse, is his *Gravitation*. By covering

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light, sound and darkness in this way, according to Coleridge, *Genesis* sets out the primal operation of his *Law of Polarity*. The *Light* is also identified in the Fourth Gospel with Christ, the *Logos*. From these connections, Abrams arrives at the conclusion that:

In Coleridge’s interwoven universe of correspondences and analogues ... “A light in sound” is the distant reflection of the light generated by the primal sound, “Let there be light”, while “a sound-like power in Light” is the distant echo of the Creative Word which became flesh and is the Light as well as the Life both of nature and man. (Abrams 181)

It is important to trace the metaphysical scheme underlying these lines, to gain some impression of the wealth of ideas they encapsulate, but inevitably this way of looking at them removes us from their function in the poem. If we return to the poetic context, we can first of all marvel that, given their provenance, they work as poetry. As in the enjoyment of Coleridge’s best visionary poetry, fixing a meaning, though vital in some ways for our engagement with the text, can often seem like the booby prize: our reward is to turn evocative poetry into dense prose. Coleridge added no footnotes pointing to arcane interpretations, and so for us these lines should be allowed to exist as they do, pregnant with a plurality of possible meanings that play *ad libitum* on our individual organic harps.

Conclusion

Can we imagine Coleridge reflecting in 1817 on the history of this poem? The poem’s twenty two years of development can be traced in a strange co-incidental time-line. It was started in 1795 the very year that John Keats was born, and took its substantially final form in 1817 after Keats now twenty two himself had perhaps unwittingly provided Coleridge with the image of “Music slumbering on its instrument”. In 1817 Coleridge was recovering from his crisis years—the publication of *Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves* represented a consolidation of his achievements, and he had hope of a new stability. The philosophical mood of *Biographia Literaria* was mellow and retrospective; his ongoing struggle to unite Trinitarian Christianity with philosophy was put aside in chapter 12 of that work in favour of an attempt to harmonise the conflicting views within philosophy itself. He quoted approvingly Leibniz’ definition of the “criterion of a true philosophy; namely that it would at once explain and collect the fragments of truth scattered through systems apparently the most incongruous... The deeper ... we penetrate into the ground of things, the more truth we discover in the doctrines of the greater number of philosophical sects.”[\[45\]](#)

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When contemplating this short poem in 1817 which was now finally called *The Eolian Harp*, perhaps Coleridge was able to enjoy a similarly harmonised view of the internal divisions it set out, and perhaps even smile at the irony that he was now eliminating its contemporary, the long and ambitious *Religious Musings* from his collected poetical works. In 1796 he described *The Eolian Harp* as “the favorite of *my* poems” (CL I 295) and as late as 1817 the act of re-reading it seems to have drawn a final glorious spark from the embers of his poetic genius.

[1] ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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[2] Strictly, the title *The Eolian Harp* belongs to the poem from the 1817 edition onwards (see the text for exact titles), but for convenience I shall refer to it by its final name throughout.

[3] I shall refer to the versions as follows: Rugby MS drafts as *Draft 1*, *Draft 2*; published versions by year of publication, i.e., 1796, 1803, 1817, 1834.

[4] I am indebted to Graham Davidson for this ingenious solution.

[5] See Barbara Rosenbaum and Pamela White (comps). *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, Vol. 4 1800 – 1900, Part I Arnold-Gissing*, London: Mansell, 1982, 523-24.

[6] Coburn considers these draft lines “probably” to predate 20 August 1795 and thus the composition of the poem (see *ibid.* +n). There is no evidence available to date the entry. Is there a possibility that these lines were sketched out after *Draft 1* but predating *Draft 2*: i.e., during the writing of the poem?

[7] *Poems on Various Subjects*, London: G.G. & J. Robinsons & Bristol: J. Cottle, 1796.

Poems by S.T. Coleridge, second edition, to which are now added Poems by Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd, Bristol: Printed by N. Biggs, for J. Cottle, and London: Messrs Robinsons, 1797.

Poems, Third Edition, London: T.N. Longman & O. Rees, 1803.

Sibylline Leaves, London: Rest Fenner, 1817.

The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge, London: William Pickering, 1834.

[8] The single item not in Coleridge’s hand is a letter to Cottle from Sara (Rugby MS, folios 39-40) consisting of *The Silver Thimble*, which was published in *Poems on Various Subjects*, 1796, under the title *Epistle V, The Production of a Young Lady, etc.* This poem, dated August 17th, 1795 indicates a degree of cohabitation and domestication between Coleridge and Sara that has led it mistakenly to be assigned to October 1795, i.e., after their wedding on 4 October 1795 (e.g. by Valerie Purton, *A Coleridge Chronology*, London: Macmillan, 1993, 21, and Richard Holmes, *Coleridge Early Visions*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989, 103 (hereafter Holmes EV)).

[9] *Coleridge Poetical Works* ed E. H. Coleridge, Oxford: OUP, 1912, Single Vol. Paperback Edition, 1969, pp 519-521. Unless otherwise notes all references to Coleridge’s poems are taken from this edition.

[10] Rugby Manuscript, folio 30 r & v.

[11] P.J. Croft, *Autograph Poetry in the English Language*, London: Cassell, 1973, 97-98.

[12] *Religious Musings*, the poetic magnum opus which Coleridge was working on throughout 1795, shows more obvious Miltonic influence in its appropriation of the rhetoric and the ambition of *Paradise Lost*, but Miltonisms, as I shall discuss later, abound in *The Eolian Harp*, and are poetically much more successful. The sandwiching of nouns by adjectives e.g. “Bright essence increate” (*Paradise Lost* III 6) should be self-explanatory. As regards the Miltonic syntax: “Harmonious” either joins with the previous line as a further adjective for “Melodies” or, if the comma after “Melodies” is emphasised, the line starting “Harmonious” can be read as a self-sufficient but syntactically ambiguous phrase. A comparable example in *Paradise Lost* would be “Dismounted, on the Aleian field I fall / Erroneous, there to wander and forlorn” (VII 19-20). For a fuller exposition of Milton’s syntactical style see Alastair Fowler’s introduction to John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Ed. Alastair Fowler, London: Longman, 2nd Ed. 1998, 15. All references to *Paradise Lost* are from this edition.

- [13] Jim Mays – letter to the author 19 November 2000.
- [14] Ibid. email to the editor 15 October 2000.
- [15] Oxford: OUP, 1993.
- [16] See Kenneth Johnston *The Hidden Wordsworth*, New York: Norton, 1998 for a spirited evocation of contemporary Cambridge student life esp. pp 127 – 130, which fleshes out a possible background to Coleridge’s penitent letters to his brother George. Scholars are not unanimously agreed on the extent of Coleridge’s self-styled Cambridge “debaucheries”, but although we might find his epistolary breast-beating to George overdone, the Godwin manuscript cited by Richard Holmes (EV 53) shows Coleridge confessing to having been, in late 1793, “loose in sexual morality”. The scenario Godwin notes of Coleridge spending “a night in a house of ill-fame” prior to his enlistment also adds corroboration to Lloyd’s fictionalised account in *Edmund Oliver*, Bristol: Cottle, 1798.
- [17] The presence of the aeolian harp at the end may reinforce such a reading if we link it with W. L. Bowles’ *Sonnet: Written at Tinemouth, Northumberland, after a Tempestuous Voyage*. The last two lines of Bowles’ sonnet in the second edition use an aeolian harp to express the feeling of comfort and safety gained after “terror past”. Although Bowles’ harp is soothing and Coleridge’s use of it here is rousing, both poems (referring here to Coleridge’s *Draft 1*) are concerned with the contemplation of the sea’s “hush’d billows” from a peaceful haven. See David Fairer & Christine Gerrard, Ed., *Eighteenth Century Poetry*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, 519.
- [18] Cit. Helen Gardner, Ed. *The Metaphysical Poets*, London: Penguin, 1972 Revised Ed., 15. (Johnson is quoting Dryden).
- [19] OED. The word is normally accented on the first syllable and Coleridge’s accent on the second syllable would thus be necessary for the scansion.
- [20] John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, Ed. John Carey, London: Longman, 1968, 162-3. In some editions the spelling is erroneously modernised as “consent”.
- [21] Ibid. lines 17-24.
- [22] Maximus of Tyre, Tr. M.B. Trapp, *Philosophical Orations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 118-119. This passage is cited by John Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1959, 76, (Hereafter Beer CV) from Thomas Taylor’s 1804 translation.
- [23] Coleridge as a Necessitarian-Optimist-Unitarian may well have retained his enthusiasm for Maximus, an obscure Middle Platonist who lectured in Rome in the second century A.D. As a part of his Unitarian belief system Coleridge held petitionary prayer to be a superstitious and vain interference in God’s perfect dispensation. (e.g. *To a Friend*: “[God] /Of whose omniscient and all-spreading Love/ ought to *implore* were impotence of mind”). In *Whether it be Necessary to Pray* (Dissertation no. XXX in Taylor’s edition), Maximus concludes that prayer is to be undertaken not for the granting of requests but for communion with the gods.
- [24] The only evil that was to confound his Optimism was the miscarriage he mistakenly believed Sara suffered in March 1796, which led him to regard “the subject of Pregnancy the most obscure of all God’s dispensations”. “The pangs which the woman suffers”, he continued, “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 192.
- [25] *Biographia Literaria* in H. J. Jackson, Ed. *The Oxford Authors Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 164.
- [26] Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Ed. Thomas Case, Oxford: Worlds Classics, 1906, 97 (2.VI.1). Bacon is referring to the emerging scientific thought when he writes of philosophy.
- [27] W. B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, in *Mythologies*, London, Macmillan, 1959, 331.
- [28] See Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, who, delighting in Coleridge’s divisions, describes *The Eolian Harp* as a “delicate example of Coleridge’s mixed feelings”. A characteristic expression of approval.
- [29] Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, Ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, second edition, London: Routledge, 1991, 20.
- [30] *The Pains of Sleep* is another good example of this struggle: “But yester-night I prayed aloud / In anguish and in agony” (14-15).
- [31] H. House cit. Geoffrey Yarlott, *Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid*, London: Methuen & Co, 1967, 307-9. Yarlott advances a theory that Coleridge’s intention behind the Christian repentance lines is to gain moral higher ground over Robert Southey with whom Coleridge had fallen out. Southey, favoured over Coleridge by the Fricker family for his virtue, had recently, to Coleridge’s disgust, announced himself willing to swear falsely to beliefs concerning the Trinity and Redemption in order to join the priesthood. The extract from *The Friend* should demonstrate how genuinely felt Coleridge’s repentance passage was, regardless of whether he was also interested in proving a point.
- [32] See *Paradise Lost* (op. cit.) VIII 122, where the archangel Raphael prefaces his answer to Adam’s enquiry into the ordering of the universe with a “What if...” cautionary note regarding the feasibility and usefulness of such knowledge for its own sake. By “What if...”, Raphael means: “what difference would this knowledge make ...” His final injunction to Adam to “be lowly wise:/Think only what concerns thee and thy being”, is not so far from the closing Christian moral of *The Eolian Harp*, that rejects “vain philosophy” in favour of walking humbly with God.

[33] According to Humphrey Davy, while in London Coleridge “talked in the course of one hour of beginning three works”. Presumably these included the vast philosophical work *An Instrument of Practical Reasoning* as later announced to Godwin and the “six or eight volume” *Bibliotheca Britannica* announced to Southey. See Holmes EV 346-8. Coleridge was still writing to Sara in 1817 about “finishing the Christabel”! (CL II 766).

[34] The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb, 3 Volumes, Ed. Edwin J. Marris Jr., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975-78, Vol. II, 111.

[35] Significantly, in his letter to Poole, 20 May 1803 (op. cit.) Coleridge announces his intention to instruct Poole and Wordsworth to be the posthumous editors of his philosophical manuscripts. Clearly “Wordsworth’s authority” was great at this time.

[36] It is interesting to note that Coleridge sent Cottle a list of errata in early July 1797 (CL I 331) which was not acted on but included the instruction to “scratch out” from the 1797 edition the following three lines:

Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause nor perch, hov’ring on untam’d wing. (1796:23-5)

(I learn from Jim Mays that Coleridge deleted these lines himself in some presentation copies of the 1797 edition.)

[37] We may also wonder about the applicability of the term “corrections”, but, as Jack Stillinger points out (op. cit. 104), this is Coleridge’s general term for revision.

[38] M.H. Abrams, ‘Coleridge’s “A Light in Sound”: Science, Metascience, and Poetic Imagination’ in *The Correspondent Breeze*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1984, 158-191 (Hereafter cited as Abrams). For detailed notes on chronology see 277n. Regarding the terminus ad quem, perhaps Abrams is optimistic in trusting Coleridge’s promise, in his letter of 22 May 1817, to deliver his completed *Sibylline Leaves* Errata “the Day after tomorrow”!

[39] John Beer, ‘Coleridge’s *Eolian Harp*: a Keatsian Echo?’, *Notes & Queries*, Vol. 245 (NS Vol. 47), September 2000. See also John Barnard’s notes to *Sleep and Poetry* in *John Keats, The Complete Poems*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 3rd Ed 1988, 577.

[40] Letter to the author 19 November 2000.

[41] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* 1799, 1805, 1850, Eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill, New York: W.W. Norton, 1979: references by version and line number from this edition. See note to lines 446-64 for the dating of this passage. In drawing parallels with Wordsworth’s poem I am not suggesting a direct literary influence—I am suggesting a common experiential source of inspiration.

[42] Ibid. Fragment 2(d) line 10.

[43] Abram’s study, which focuses on *The Eolian Harp*, will be relied on here, but John Beer has covered the same background extended generally over Coleridge’s thought in *Coleridge the Visionary* (op.cit.) and his *Coleridge’s Poetic Intelligence*, London: Macmillan, 1977.

[44] From Conclusion to *Aids to Reflection*, cit. Abrams 170.

[45] BL Ed. Jackson, op. cit., 287.