I

A Copy of Verses?

Is a detailed study of this poem worth the candle? It has never received much attention, and is largely passed over as occasional, as having few if any of the qualities of his best poetry. But I think of it as one of the great romantic odes, in which Coleridge wove several strands of his genius together, incorporating, to adapt his words, all the spirits of power which had stirred his thought from boyhood onwards. Some features of the poem, including its structure, are akin to Keats’ Nightingale, although there is no return to the world from which the poet seeks escape. And like Dejection: An Ode, it begins with a sense of desolation and ends with a recovery of power, but a recovery so different that the two poems might be regarded as opposing poles of Coleridge’s creativity, only one of which was he willing to recognize unreservedly.

The underestimation of ‘The Garden of Boccaccio’ begins with Coleridge himself who, in passing, remarked that it was written

for one of the Engravings, ‘Boccaccio’s Garden’—of which if you should say, they are a vigorous Copy of Verses, you would confer all the commendation, I should be willing to receive from your Judgement.  

(CL VI 779)

We may agree that they are indeed vigorous, but what does he mean by the derogatory ‘Copy of Verses’? Even if he is pointing to their ekphrastic origin, nonetheless this appears to be a wholesale dismissal, a relegation to the status of pound or penny-earner, worth no more attention. But one should accede to Coleridge’s judgement of his poems with caution. The most obvious instance of his setting a false trail is Kubla Khan, which he published, he says, only as ‘a psychological curiosity’, thus distancing himself from any moral deviance a reader might find there. ‘The Pains of Sleep’ also had an explosive unpremeditated origin, a morally unstable centre, and though Coleridge quoted from the poem in letters, he tended to treat it in the same way as Kubla Khan, not granting it the author’s unconditional imprimatur. Thus, sending the first draft to Robert Southey, he writes

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1 This paper is for Dometa Brothers, who liked the original, and loves the poem. I would also like to thank Peter Larkin for encouraging me to publish this revised version and for providing additional insights; and James Vigus for a meticulous proof-reading.

2 Borrowed from the title Jim Mays’ Kilve talk on the interest of Coleridge’s plays, CB 29, Summer 2007

3 Vide II.28-9

4 John Beer makes the point that Keats may have influenced Coleridge, rather than the more normally accepted vice-versa, in ‘Coleridge’s “Eolian Harp”: A Keatsian Echo?’, Notes and Queries 47 (245):3 Sept, 321-22. There is no evidence that Coleridge had read any of Keats’ odes, but as John Beer points out Joseph Henry Green was Keats’ instructor at Guys, and Coleridge’s fellow labourer on the Opus Maximum. It is quite conceivable that Green had a copy of the 1820 poems, and shared the contents with Coleridge.
I do not know how I came to scribble down these verses to you—my heart was aching, my head all confused—but they are, doggerls as they may be, a true portrait of my nights. (CL II 984)

What will be recognized as one of Coleridge’s most honest poems, and one of his best-loved, begins life, in the author’s view, as ‘doggrels’. He wanted to express the spiritual condition the poem so poignantly reveals, ‘a true portrait of my nights’, but it was a condition the man conscious of his public image was not comfortable with. Writing to the Beaumonts some ten days after his letter to Southey, he asserts that the verses were the product of an earlier illness, but verses he had forgotten ‘till the return of the Complaint, & which I will send you in my next as a curiosity.’

Both Kubla Khan and ‘The Pains of Sleep’ are thus presented as different kinds of curiosity, one just as verses (as ‘The Garden…’ was a ‘Copy of Verses’) but neither of them poems, and not works the author wants to claim as part of his canon. Of the volume which contained these two poems and Christabel, he says consistently over a long period of time that ‘publication was utterly against my feelings and my Judgement…’. We may believe him, while also recognizing that these poems held a kind of interest he was not openly willing to admit.

As he grew older, Coleridge’s need to write highly personal and confessional poetry did not diminish, especially when love was the subject—which it often was. However, he became extremely adept at what Gregory Leadbetter describes as ‘hiding himself in the open’, or what Tim Fulford has identified as creating a persona ‘in which the author is unimagineable by the reader as a figure beyond his texts…’. We only need remember such poems as ‘The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-tree’, ‘The Pang More Sharp than All’, and ‘Love’s Apparition and Evanishment’ to see how well Coleridge manages this confessional concealment. Although not allegorical, the figure of Coleridge the poet in ‘The Garden of Boccaccio’ is both more in the open and more carefully hidden than in many late poems—by which I mean that though openly confessional at the outset, probably because the sentiments express spiritual desolation rather than moral destitution, what enables him to put on the power of Boccaccio’s bacchic world, raising him from his desolation, is deeply buried in the poem.

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5 Coleridge saw himself as a public figure very early in his life—see, for instance, PW 150 ll.35-9.
6 CL II 993 and fn.1. Coleridge refers to an attack nine years earlier, i.e. 1794.
7 CL III 634, fn. 1; see also CL III 495, CL V 162, 437.
8 For Coleridge’s complex attitude to his own publications at an earlier date, 1802, see Heidi Thomson, “Merely the Emptying out of my De-sk”, CB 31 (Summer 2008) pp.73-89, which describes the consequences of ‘Coleridge’s need to find a socially sanctioned public outlet for his feelings.’ (p.74) I suggest that what The Morning Post did for him in 1802, The Keepsake did for him in 1828-9.
Jim Mays, in his headnote, while observing that Coleridge brought many of his important experiences to the poem, also tacitly accepts his judgement of it, listing the various ways in which Coleridge neglected it:

There is only one ms, a hastily written and incompletely revised fair copy submitted to the printer. C made further revisions in proof, and, after the poem had been published in *The Keepsake*, it was included in *PW* (1829, 1834). However, while the poem called on experiences… which were important to him, it appears to have been put together to meet a particular commitment and not to have engaged much more of his attention. The ms given to the printer contains patent errors… it is incomplete, and it is unrevised. At the proof stage C failed to add a passage he had intended to incorporate; he did not keep a copy of what he had submitted… and he made no further corrections to the text after it had been printed…

What Mays takes as evidence of Coleridge’s lack of engagement, I see as evidence of an anxiety not to take the poem too seriously, nor to have readers make much of it. It was composed quickly, and thus like *The Pains of Sleep*, avoided some of the processes of self-censorship evident in the allegorical poems. On the other hand a version of lines 46-56, which are at the centre, and I will suggest, at the heart of the poem, had been jotted down some nine years earlier—which, coincidently, he told the Beaumonts, was the period *The Pains of Sleep* had lain dormant in his mind, and the 1819 note was also written in the same metre as *The Pains…*, octosyllabic rhyming couplets. The evidence points towards a long meditated poem, which had not found its focus, suddenly catalysed into existence—and in this respect I doubt Mays’ judgement that it was ‘put together’ (with a pitchfork?) for the occasion. The only positive claim Coleridge made for the poem was that it was ‘vigorous’, something also true of *The Pains of Sleep*; there is also a vigour in the structure, informing the progress from a profound desolation to an uninhibited realization of power: what is peculiar, by comparison with *Dejection: an Ode*, is the chthonic nature of this power.

II

The poem begins, (ll. 1-10) like the Dejection ode, in that mood which I take as the scourge of the god-believing but god-deserted, the poet sitting at his desk in his attic, cowering before his own ‘Vacancy,’ suffering the accidie of a kind of monastic isolation; the visionary gleam has fled and he is silent, pensive, looking to past memories for relief from the dull continuous ache of

11 See fn.4; there is also a nine-year gap between the fly-catcher entry and the writing of ‘Love’s Apparation and Evanishment’, PW 688.
non-experience: ‘Life seems emptied of all genial Powers,’ and past and present are ‘bereft alike of Grief and Glee’. Again, we can see parallels with the opening of Dejection….

The process of recovery takes place in three principal stages. The first is centred on Anne Gillman’s placing of Stothard’s picture on his desk; the second stage is the action of the picture on his mind, the central and most complex action; and the third is his sense of being in the world which the picture represents, rather as the nightingale takes Keats into another world—but Coleridge stays on in his garden.

The hand of Anne Gillman

One simple act, weighted with tenderness, begins the process of relief from this ‘numbing Spell’:

O Friend! Long wont to notice yet conceal,
And soothe by silence what words cannot heal,
I but half saw that quiet hand of thine
Place on my desk this exquisite Design…

Although Anne Gillman may only have been placing on his desk what had been sent to him by the editor or proprietor of The Keepsake,\(^\text{12}\) and which he expected, Coleridge takes the engraving as her gift, and a gift addressing the very ills of which the opening ten lines complain; therefore a gift which only someone who knew him very well could have given, someone who was ‘long wont to notice yet conceal’—though clearly an incomplete concealment, not preventing the poet knowing that she intended to ‘soothe by silence…’ The next lines spark into life in a way that intimates the energy of the latter part of the poem:

Boccaccio’s Garden and its Faery,
The Love, the Joyaunce and the Gallantry!
An IDYLL, with Boccaccio’s Spirit warm,
Fram’d in the silent Poesy of Form.

A quiet hand presents a wordless gift, the silent poesy of its form soothing the poet in the silence he shared with the giver, anticipating Boccaccio’s warm, sensuous spirit. It’s a great gift, for ‘Poesy’ is a carefully chosen word, and suggests what in the Biographia he calls ‘the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.’ (BL II 26) But is it the gift or the giver that enables the re-awakening of power in him? The poem’s answer is the gift, but to look no further may be to accept Coleridge’s occlusion of the poem’s real source of power.

If one tries to imagine how it happened, Anne Gillman’s act is curious: Coleridge says that he ‘half saw that quiet hand of thine/ Place on my desk this

\(^{12}\) PW 652, hn.
exquisite Design.’ How can he only be half-conscious of her act? Did she steal into his room hardly noticed, without knocking? Was she in the habit of sitting in his room while he worked? We don’t know, but we can be sure that such an act would have required an intimacy, the depth of which can be seen in the notebook introduction to ‘Work without Hope’, dated 21 February 1825:

Strain in the manner of G. Herbert—: which might be entitled, The Alone Most Dear: a Complaint of Jacob to Rachel as in the tenth year of his Service he saw in her or fancied that he saw Symptoms of Alienation. (CN IV 5192)

Mrs Gillman has written on this page, ‘It was fancy’, and as Paul Cheshire points out, given Coleridge’s marginal note explaining the etymology of ‘amaranths’, he must have expected her to read this entry; thus, though her comment is not dateable, it seems that, without either of them speaking directly to each other, they communicated a silent and serious devotion. Interestingly, Paul Cheshire has discovered that alongside, very faintly, but not quite in line, and therefore probably not contemporaneous, is the phrase ‘and only fancy 1834’. The date is significant because it is the year in which Coleridge died. Anne Gillman may have been going through his notebooks, helping her husband prepare his biography, and took the chance to re-assert her belief in their devotion, declaring that it was ever thus, though many of his poems appear to cast doubt on the survival of their love. It is remarkable that they were both willing to see their relationship as rehearsing this great Biblical romance. Coleridge signs off as ‘Jacob Hodierne’, or the modern Jacob. So any indication of her active sympathy during the course of their relationship is likely to make Coleridge believe that his Rachel is still faithful to him, that his ‘sister mirror’ remains unbroken, and that he can work with hope. Her act of placing the picture on his desk is therefore at least as significant as the picture itself, for his faith is restored, though from this point on Coleridge’s attention is apparently directed first towards the picture, and later to Boccaccio’s works, leaving Anne Gillman behind; but having suggested that Coleridge’s returning powers may have been catalysed by her sympathy, I want to show that a form of her presence moves much further into the poem than its surface suggests, and that the life of the poem is in some measure their life, concealed and silent though it was.

_Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where_

There are three words in his first impression of the picture—the four lines above—which I would like to draw attention to. First, ‘Faery’, recalling Spenser of course; and what Coleridge so admired about Spenser’s creation was its ‘marvellous independence or true imaginative absence of all particular space & time—it is... truly the Land of Faery, i.e. in mental space—’ (CN III

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13 See ‘An Obliterated Study’ in this issue, pp.16-17. It seems that the latter, and perhaps later, part of the phrase was erased: both were in pencil. Coleridge wrote the note in his tenth year at Highgate. Griggs prints the notebook entry as a letter to an unknown correspondent; see CL V 414.
Boccaccio’s garden is ‘Fram’d in the silent Poesy of Form’, and given Coleridge’s use of the word ‘poesy’, we can see that he is describing an act of the imagination which, like Keats’ urn, educes a place free of space and time, where all is always now. Through this act Coleridge enters a world of mental space and so begins the process, we might say, of fading into the forest dim, forgetting ‘The weariness, the fever, and the fret,’ and moving out of the time- and space-bound world, out of his study, and into the world of Romance. This world he describes as an ‘IDYLL’ (in capitals) composed of ‘Love’, ‘Joyaunce’ and ‘Gallantry’. Love and Gallantry can speak for themselves, but ‘IDYLL’ and ‘Joyaunce’ repay closer attention.

So, ‘Joyaunce’—but not ‘joy’, is my principle observation. The OED attributes its original use to Spenser, offering the connotations of delight, festivity and merrymaking, which we might associate with the power the poem finally puts on; ‘joyance’ is a word used in that context in ‘The Eolian Harp’, summing up the place courtship has in disclosing the unity of life: ‘A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,/ Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—.’ Therefore, different from ‘joy’, a word Coleridge and Wordsworth use to express a sublime or transcendental condition of spirit. ‘Joyaunce’ sits well with another small but significant word in this poem—‘glee’—carrying overtones of a manner of celebrating Life quite opposed to the puritan-platonic ‘joy’. The two or three readers of Bulletin 19 will remember a picture of a glee-club, in which the men, with their backs to us, and their coat-tails dividing round bums in tight, white trousers, are singing ‘Life’s a Bum—per’ as the servant brings in a trayful of drinks, and the ladies, several of whom seem to be overflowing their dresses, are disposed in a variety of attitudes around the room. Coleridge visited a Glee-club in January 1808, and was ‘much delighted’.

Love, Joyaunce, and Gallantry are the components of this ‘Idyll’, a word which seems to have had a particular significance for Coleridge. In 1830 he was to describe the ‘Song of Songs’ as a ‘charming Idyll’, and whereas he once thought that no spiritual significance could be attached to that work, now he is willing ‘to adopt the contrary judgement’. Therefore we might consider an idyll—originating in a celebration of sense—as realizing the spiritual potential of inclination, of the possibility of rising from delight and desire to the ideas of reason and religion.

‘Idyll’ is also a word Coleridge associated with Genesis. In discussing the curse of and remedies for barrenness in the Old Testament, and pointing out the apparent absence of sexual motivation in Rachel’s giving and Jacob’s accepting of her handmaid, Coleridge asserts that it is ‘the healthful unfaltering plainness of the Narrative’ clothed ‘as with a garment of Light’ by ‘the

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14 PW 115, ll.28-9
16 CN V 6486; he compares it to ‘the lovely allegory of Cupid and Psyche’.
17 Jim Mays suggests that around 1800 Coleridge’s immersion in Schiller had ‘fostered his thinking about inclination, as opposed to Kantian duty.’ (PW I i clxxi) This distinction between duty and inclination, or as it eventually proves to be, between duty and power, I take as that underlying philosophy and poetry.
translucent Spirit of Innocence’ which ‘gives the unique Idyllic Charm to the Book of Genesis.’ (CN V 6187) The Song of Songs as a ‘charming Idyll’, Genesis as clothed in ‘Idyllic Charm’, there is something here to enrich our reading of the ‘IDYLL’ which is Boccaccio’s garden—and which itself has Biblical echoes: it is the ‘fair Creation of the artist’ where Coleridge can ‘wander through the Eden of [his] Hand’, though perhaps we are not to forget that it was Anne Gillman’s ‘quiet hand’ that first presented this Eden to Coleridge. In his reading of the Bible, Romance points to Religion, to a central spiritual truth, and is not confined to the realization of desire or appetite. ‘The Garden of Boccaccio’ is a Paradise which Coleridge will visit briefly, and where he might have wandered freely in the silent companionship of Anne Gillman.

III

A Tremulous Warmth

The focus of the second stage is the line, ‘The Picture stole upon my inward Sight.’ There is a process of internalization by which the object, the picture, is co-ordinated with the subject, ‘inward Sight’, in which mind and picture become one entity, described in two loosely linked similes:

Like flocks adown a newly-bathéd Steep
Emerging from a mist: or like a Stream
Of music soft that notdispels the Sleep
But casts in happier moulds the Slumberer’s Dream

... The Picture stole upon my inward Sight

The process is represented as the definite emerging from the indefinite, yet remaining part of it; so that the flocks are part of the freshly rain- or mist-soaked hillside from which they seem to emerge;18 the softly playing music doesn’t fully wake the sleeper, but combines with semi-consciousness to create a happier dream. These carefully worked images illustrate the emerging of a new and empowered condition. And the picture is ‘Gaz’d by an idle Eye with silent might.’ Here is an interesting conjunction of idleness, power and silence. The eye is ‘idle’, that is, not being used as a sensory or rational tool, and the gazing is performed with the silent, unspeaking, might of the inner eye. It is

18 The image ‘Like flocks adown a newly-bathéd Steep/Emerging from a mist’ I think both unique in Coleridge’s poetry, and redolent, but redolent of what I’m not sure. The only other image I can connect with this is from ‘Constancy…’ is Coleridge describing his doubts as to whether his vision of his ‘loveliest Friend’, Thought and Love combined, is real or unreal; ‘And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when/The woodman winding westward up the glen/At wintry dawn, where o’er the sheep-track’s maze/The viewless snow-mist weaves a glis’ning haze…’, but that is the loosest of connections, the only defence of which is that both images are describing or questioning an emerging reality. Also II.95-102 ‘Religious Musings’ (PW 101), beginning ‘As when a Shepherd on a vernal morn/Thro’ some thick fog creeps tim’rous with slow foot…’ which is also about emerging from confusion to clarity. The same connection between ‘Constancy…’ and ‘Religious Musings’ is made by Richard Hocks in “’And art thou nothing?’: Permanence and Evanishment in ‘Constancy to an Ideal Object,’” Coleridge Bulletin 16 (2000), 73
not tending towards particular utterance—to the expression of little things, but to the realization of a silent whole.

‘Gazing’ is an important word in Coleridge’s poetry, often, but not always, differentiating the aesthete’s mere looking from the meditative consciousness of the poet. The process he describes here is similar to the process ascribed to Charles Lamb in ‘This Lime-tree Bower…’, the Quantock landscape replacing Stothard’s picture. Coleridge imagines Lamb, ‘Silent with swimming sense… gazing round/ On the wide landscape, till all doth seem/ Less gross than bodily…’. It is imagined as a silent, God-revealing process there but, again to anticipate, here it will finally enable the perception of a whole world in the third stage of his revival, when he ‘can descry’ the artist’s fair creation ‘with a waking Eye.’

The act of imagining on Lamb’s behalf caused a ‘delight’ to come sudden on Coleridge’s heart; here he also gains a sense of renewal, but less sudden, more tentative:

A tremulous Warmth crept gradual o’er my Chest,  
As though an Infant’s Finger touch’d my Breast.

This delicate image first appears in a notebook in 1802, and was used in the same year in ‘The Day Dream’, a poem about Sara Hutchinson. Coleridge’s daydream is of Sara being present while Coleridge dozes, and though woken, he still feels that,

about the heart  
A dear and playful Tenderness doth linger  
Touching my Heart as with a Baby’s finger.

Thus this image is closely connected with the beloved’s presence, an association re-inforced later in the same poem through comparable lines:

Across my chest there liv’d a weight so warm  
As if some bird had taken shelter there;  
And lo! upon the Couch a Woman’s Form!  
Thine, Sara! thine! O joy, if thine it were! 19

It proves not to be Sara’s form, but the method by which he seeks to apprehend Sara herself through the perceived form is worth noting:

I gaz’d with anxious hope, and fear’d to stir it—  
A deeper Trance ne’er wrapt a yearning Spirit. 20

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19 Cf these lines from ‘A Day Dream’ (May 1802 or 1826-8) PW 197 and 629  
   O ever—ever be thou blest  
   For dearly, ASRA! love I thee!  
   This brooding warmth across my breast  
   This depth of tranquil bliss – ah me!

20 PW 294
The trance is that suspension of outward consciousness, the rational eye, that enables him to gaze on what is not actually present in the material world, like the dematerializing process of gazing ‘till all doth seem/ Less gross than bodily’. But his gazing on the half-realized figure is an attempt to permit Sara’s self to emerge from the mist of this condition; and were it not for Hartley’s ‘elfish Laugh’ which woke him fully, Coleridge ‘seem’d SURE my Love to see,/ Her very Self in her own quiet Home…’. The possibly illusory nature of this kind of hope is recognized in some poems, such as ‘Constancy…’, but in ‘The Day Dream’ his belief that his gazing will disclose Sara’s ‘very Self’ is not deemed fanciful, and only prevented by Hartley’s interruption.\(^\text{21}\)

Thus the image of the infant’s finger is central to the waking of a certain kind consciousness in Coleridge, consciousness of the comforting presence of a woman’s ‘very self’.\(^\text{22}\) Is Coleridge’s awareness of Anne Gillman’s quiet hand and silent, soothing presence of the same order as his delighted if mistaken consciousness of Sara’s very self? Both can be associated with this waking of a tremulous warmth in him: and perhaps the fact that Anne Gillman is only present in the diminished form of her quiet hand, and utters no words, may suggest that Coleridge is conscious less of her physical presence than of her ‘very self’. So it is not surprising that immediately after the image of the ‘tremulous Warmth’, Coleridge declares

\begin{quote}
And one by one (I know not whence) were brought
All Spirits of Power, that most had stirr’d my Thought
In selfless Boyhood… (27-29)
\end{quote}

Two years later, in 1830, he associates lines 31-2, speaking of his youth, which ‘...kindled from above,/ ‘Loved ere it loved, and sought a form for Love’ with his 1795 sonnet on Brockley Coomb, written for Sara Fricker, and retrospectively associated with Sara Hutchinson.\(^\text{23}\) Yet in respect of this sense of returning power, the 1830 note does not, as Coleridge does elsewhere, particularly in the \textit{Opus Maximum}, assert the impossibility of the shy body leading, but accepts that appetite can be transmuted into love by the idea of beauty—or romance can lead to religion.\(^\text{24}\) Desire is love’s pure flame.\(^\text{25}\) But his unwillingness to admit, even to himself, the role of Anne Gillman in the revival of these spirits of power is reflected in that ‘I know not whence’. What

\(^{21}\) For belief in a self ‘irrelative to time and space’ (CN II 3146) see ‘Phantom’, PW 347.


\(^{23}\) CN V 6498

\(^{24}\) Richard Hocks notes, ‘as Arden Reed aptly points out, this scene “is the essential story Coleridge never ceased trying to tell: passion redirected in the service of religion, a movement from low to high, from darkness to light, from coldness to warmth, from isolation to community.” CB 16, p.74. Arden Reed, \textit{Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire} (Hanover: Brown UP 1983) page 91

\(^{25}\) CN IV 5146 (PW 597): ‘Where true love burns, Desire is Love’s pure Flame.’ For other notes on love and beauty, see CN IV 5428, 5370, CN V 6448.
we can say is that the tremulous warmth has enabled him to review his past life happily, not his usual custom, and that that couldn't have happened unless some real happiness had just come upon him. But equally, the tacit denial of Anne Gillman’s presence would not only have been a bit of domestic diplomacy, but an act of poetic judgement: towards its conclusion the poem moves away from a generalized romance landscape, and closer to that consummation for which all lovers devoutly wish.

_A thousand tempting voices_

The revival of power then takes on a series of illustrations from Coleridge’s past: that is, there is an apparent digression before arriving at the present, in which he takes ‘a brief review of his past life’, before we get to Boccaccio’s garden.26 His examples are not ordinarily associated with his youthful interests:

Wild strain of Scalds, that in the sea-worn Caves  
Rehears’d their war-spell to the winds and waves;  
Or fateful Hymn of those prophetic Maids,  
That call’d on Hertha in deep Forest Glades:  
Or minstrel Lay, that cheer’d the Baron’s Feast;  
Or Rhyme of City pomp, of Monk and Priest,  
Judge, Mayor, and many a Guild in long Array,  
To high Church pacing on the Great Saint’s Day.

Skalds are Scandinavian poets. Hertha—or Nerthus, mother earth—is a goddess of fertility, whose mysteries Coleridge regarded, following Friedrich Schlegel, as ‘degeneracies of the Samothracian’.27 That the maids are prophetic, their hymn fateful and they call on Hertha may be because these lines represent the regeneration of those mysteries by Christianity. Coleridge had an early but ever undiminished respect for Northern mythology, for the Edda—‘the Gothic mythology—of which the Edda is a genuine relique—[is] distinguished by a lofty unity of Purpose’28—and for the qualities that the Northern races brought to the introduction of Christianity and their development as nations. What they brought was a sense of unity where the Greeks and Romans had ‘divided the Intelligible into the individualities of many Gods.’29

On 17 March 1796, still only 23, he published a _Watchman_ essay on the ‘Manners and Religion of the ancient Germans…’ which opens, ‘The dark forests of Germany were inhabited by a race of men against whom the Romans… maintained a doubtful contest’, because, fought between ‘a free nation, fierce in the enthusiasm of a warlike superstition, and the timid slaves of Rome…’ the outcome was not long in doubt. Coleridge’s praise for the belligerent

26 Anne Gillman’s words: ‘The night before his death I was carried up to his chamber. He took a brief review of his past life, we conversed together a little while, and then he bade me “good-bye”.’ Lucy E Watson, _Coleridge at Highgate_ (London, 1925) 159.
27 LL II 56 and fns; see also, _Hertha_ by Swinburne: ‘Before God was,/ I am.’ The grammar, if not the sentiment, would have appealed to Coleridge.
28 LL II 55
29 ‘Religious Musings’, PW 101, 1133 fn
qualities of the tribes he regularly calls Gothic is consistent throughout his work, and will recur in 1818, when he asserts, magnificently, that the ‘history of any country begins with the Gothic’. Above all the northern nations maintained an idea, expressed in the Edda, of God as “The Author of everything that existeth; the Eternal Being... the Being that never changeth”, and to whom is attributed infinite power, boundless knowledge, and justice. ‘To erect statues to this Deity, or to think of confining him within the inclosure of walls, was held absurd and impious.’ Thus, quoting Mallet, he believes that “it was only within woods and consecrated forests that they could serve him properly...” (W 91) The indefinite—the infinite and the boundless—is best worshipped outside the symbols of the definite. The skalds are reformers, and Coleridge a field preacher. These simple lines are redolent of a lifelong interest.

It may be pressing a point to say that the 1828 lines, ending ‘in deep Forest glades’ is infused with the spirit of the 1796 Watchman essay—opening with the dark forests of Germany—but another early fragment of the same period contains a movement of thought matched in the poem. He tells the story of Saemund the Wise, who sought to convert the souls of his Icelandic brethren to Christianity, but collected the ‘the Saws and War-songs of their pagan Forefathers’ because in ‘the Runic Lays... there were powers and qualities which being transposed to a purer and fitter base formed a spiritual nourishment...’. However, his best-loved pupil isn’t quite satisfied, and wants to know about Saemundur’s ‘Travels to the South’, to Rome and Italy, where ‘the most luscious Fruits are said to grow in the open air—yey, it is as if the South invited us thither still onward and onward with a thousand tempting voices...’, drawn by the ‘restlessness of Hope’—a key Coleridgean phrase. Saemundur ‘meditated awhile’, clearly not knowing how to respond to this request, and the story breaks off as he

struck the Harp with an impetuous hand, and thus began

Scald by the northern Sea in ocean Cave—
Bard in the center of the Lonely Forest—
The Minstrel at the City [Feuds/Friends procession
Feuds/ Friends Palaces]

Genius of Italy—Boccaccio—

Given the 30 years or more intervening between Saemundur’s story and the writing of the poem, it is remarkable how close the two are in both language

30 LL II 75; cf. his respect for Luther: ‘The Bible was a spiritual indeed but not a figurative Armoury in his belief: it was the magazine of his war-like stores, and thence he was to arm himself, and supply both Shield and Sword, and Javelin to the Elect.’ F II 119
31 SWF I 67-8; the prose is on BM MS Egerton 2800 f 2, the verse on f 3, and the editors treat the two as different entries. I haven’t consulted the ms, but as Saemundur is about to break out into song, I see no reason not to treat them as continuous. The editors supplied the words in square brackets.
and direction. Although in the poem an important passage intervenes between the song of the skalds and celebrating Italy and Boccaccio, this is the direction the poem has taken from the beginning, and whatever has occurred previously in both story and poem is only preparative to that celebration. Here we might notice that the lines 39 to 42 (‘Or minstrel lay… Great Saint’s Day’) are close to those at the end of the Saemundur story, but their significance uncertain. They contain faint echoes of Coleridge’s poetry (Bracy will have sung a ‘minstrel Lay’, but did it cheer Lord Roland de Vaux? and those to ‘High Church pacing…’ may have been ‘the goodly company’ that ‘walk together to the Kirk’) but of course in 1796 Christabel and The Ancient Mariner were yet to be written. I think it more fruitful to suggest that these lines represent Coleridge’s view of the society that developed out of Christianity’s introduction to the benign paganism of the Gothic tribes: there is thus a continuity of interest both in the lines themselves, and with his insights into nation-making. They represent a disciplined, continent and socially religious society, which can be contrasted with the much freer society of the South found in the second half of the poem. Such a reading would also substantiate the couplet introducing this section, in which the revived spirits of power ‘lent a lustre to [his] earnest Scan/Of Manhood, musing what and whence is Man!’ His musing began early, and continued for his lifetime.

This movement from North to South, from the severe discipline of the skalds to the rich, fruitful lands of Italy and the coupling dances of Boccaccio, is therefore a lifelong movement in Coleridge’s consciousness: it is a reflection of his movement from Kant’s belief in duty to Schiller’s emphasis on feeling, literally rehearsed in his travels first to Germany and later to Italy. What significance should we attribute to that restlessness of hope and those thousand tempting voices? From another perspective, his journey is circular: having started in Greece and Rome, he moved north to discover a unity of consciousness which the ancient mythologies had never achieved. That unity established, he moves south again, though not to Greece or Rome, but to Italy in the fourteenth century; and the genius of Italy was less a Roman or a Greek genius, more the genius of romance, a medieval genius in which matter and spirit are much closer natural allies than they ever have been since the reformation. As we progress through the poem, it is to that kind of unity that I think we should look to understand the nature of this ‘Copy of Verses’.

Poesy—and Philosophy, ‘Though then unconscious of herself…’

Although lines 46–56 are at the centre, and I believe, the heart of this 109 line poem, they can be easily passed over as no more than a slightly arch reference to Coleridge’s lifelong interest in the relationship between philosophy and poetry, and the unity of consciousness that they can create. They were jotted down as octosyllabics in a notebook in 1819, with other small sections of verse

32 However, rather than taking this as an essential impetus in Coleridge’s mind, one might argue that he is merely finding old stuff and welding it loosely together, which I take as Jim Mays’ view.
and prose, and imagine the union of philosophy and poetry in a child at play.\footnote{CN IV 4623; see also ‘The Prometheus of Aeschylus’ for union of the two in the childhood of mankind, SWF II 1267} I set out the lines of the poem after the lines of the note to make comparison easier.

1819
And there was young Philosophy
Unconscious of herself, pardie,
And now she hight Poesy—

And like a child, in life-ful glee,
Had newly left her Mother’s knee,
Prattles and plays with flower & stone
As if with faery play-fellows
Revealed to Innocence alone—

1828
And last, a Matron now, of sober mien
Yet radiant still and with no earthly sheen,
Whom as a faery child my Childhood woo’d
Even in my Dawn of Thought—PHILOSOPHY,
Though then unconscious of herself, pardie,
She bore not other name than POESY;
And, like a Gift from Heaven, in lifeful Glee,
That had but newly left a Mother’s knee,
Prattled and play’d with Bird and Flower and Stone,
As if with elfin Playfellows well known,
And Life revealed to Innocence alone.

The major addition is the figure of philosophy as a matron, before she is seen as a child. Few changes have been made to the earlier verses—Coleridge was very nearly satisfied with what he had written ten years earlier. He describes a perfect or idealized state in which poesy and philosophy are at one. Only a few months after writing the octosyllabics, he re-asserts that same ideal at the beginning of a neglected note on the imagination: ‘All metaphysic… is in its origin poetic: & in Poesy, that highest in which Phil. & Poetry interpenetrate, & mutually co-inhere it must end.’ (CN IV 4692) He came to distinguish ‘poetry’, words in metre, from ‘poesy’, the intended outcome of all the fine arts, which represents that ideal unity of consciousness.

Childhood provides the two principal conditions enabling that rightful union and thus the creation of poesy; the first of which is that philosophy is unconscious of herself. Philosophy is personified as an independent discipline, but simultaneously, at least as a child, denied self-consciousness. Exist, he says to philosophy, but don’t make your presence felt—don’t let me be conscious of you; you are doing your job best when we are least aware of you. The fear of a
self-conscious philosophy is almost certainly rooted in Coleridge’s ability to find in ‘abstruse Research’ a refuge from alienated feelings or unrealized hopes, peculiarly disabled for most of his life from finding himself at home in his own household, or whatever household he was temporarily part of. Under such conditions he preferred not to feel at all, and suppressed his longings “To have a home, an English home, and thee!”, by intense intellectual activity, of which he was capable to an unusual degree. He had habituated himself to this kind of thinking from his earliest years, when it manifested itself as unremitting reading; for he never felt quite at home, even in Ottery, his father alive and surrounded by a large family.

Thus ‘abstruse Research’ took from him, he says, ‘all the Natural Man’ (PW 289, l. 268)—the man who feels that his home is in this world—Boccaccio’s world—so richly revealed in the second half of this poem. He found it impossible to be both metaphysically conscious, and also, ‘like a child, in lifeful glee’, to prattle and play. His interpretation of Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound saw the hero as the bringer of Nous, the ideas of Reason, the philosophical fire of our humanity, isolated from the world for which his gift was intended, powerless, and insulted by Hermes, the representation of the senses. The metaphysically conscious man and the natural man are in conflict, or one form of life competes with another, and the only resolution is a co-existence, for Prometheus to be unchained, to be reconciled to Jove, for Reason to guide the Understanding, the despotism of the senses to be quietly, silently governed by a greater power unconscious of itself. Man cannot live by Reason alone, and for Coleridge, ‘life-ful glee’ is a resonant phrase—life is life when it is glee-ful, when it is exuberant, rumbustious and playful, when the senses find their right place in it. Philosophy therefore cannot be self-conscious, isolated as a discipline, if it is to unite with poetry, but must participate in the world where we have our being, or not at all.

Mother and child: the recovery of Innocence

That brings us to the second condition for the union of philosophy and poesy—it is revealed, says the 1819 note, ‘to Innocence alone.’ What is revealed is uncertain, but in 1828 the outcome is made explicit: it is ‘Life’ that is revealed ‘to Innocence alone’. Life and poesy have become synonymous: there could hardly be a more fundamental revelation. Coleridge is looking back on a lost condition, the myth he made of childhood, and the implication is that there has been a fall. After the eight lines of octosyllabics, the note continues in prose and verse, closing with
New Creation—“fell not out in man & by man must arise—St. Paul—
Then Poesy shall rise into Philosophy
When Philosophy hath known herself as Poesy (ποιησις)\(^{38}\)

The conditions of ‘New Creation’ are one with the revelation of Life: philosophy and poesy must unite under the auspices of innocence, inter-acting in the manner of the resurrection (‘shall rise’) and the incarnation (‘hath known herself’). What is crammed into three lines here has an echo towards the end of the note on metaphysics and imagination. He has been doing battle with those who believe that experience is derived from the senses only, alogists or metapotheecaries, no believers in nous or Reason, declaring that ‘if only the souls of better mould, made to live in the courts of the Sun, could be drawn into the Valley of Vision—if only I could raise them by magnetic power from their present twilight of Somnambulism to Clairvoyance—what a new Heaven & a new Earth, would begin to reveal itself.’\(^{39}\) The phrase ‘a new Heaven & a new Earth’ is from Revelation 21:1, but expresses the same kind of hope that Coleridge attributes to St Paul when he determines the conditions of a ‘New Creation’.

What also becomes evident is that the method of play, established in childhood through relations with the mother, will be the method of the poet in relation to the figure of philosophy. Between the first eight lines of verse, and the closing lines on ‘New Creation’ there is a consideration of the relationship of mother and child and how this affects the child’s perception of her toys: in this Coleridge discovers a method which can be read as the foundation of creativity. The words are elliptic, and begin with a subjectless verb, though the child is implied, who

Exerts the power excited in her as passive or negative subject by the Mother & becoming in her turn positive acts upon her Toys, like Light, that meeting eyeless things falls back & so reflects the image of her inward self.

The process that Coleridge outlines here is one which is at the heart of his mature thinking: that the objective world—that which we experience as outside us—does not act on us, as Wordsworth believed of Nature, but we act on it, providing the light by which objects, including toys, are seen—not so much made visible, as given value.\(^{40}\) The objective world does not bestow light—there are no impulses from vernal woods: they and all objects are ‘eyeless things’,

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\(^{38}\) The grammar of the first of these last three lines is curious: one would expect either ‘fell not out in man but by man…’ or ‘fell not out in man and by man…’. I haven’t been able to check the transcription. The quotation marks are unclosed in the text, closed when quoted in the notes. KC couldn’t find an exactly matching quote from St Paul.

\(^{39}\) CN IV 4692, f.21

\(^{40}\) The relationship between mind and nature was the subject of a debate, and of difference, between the two men, and Coleridge offered Wordsworth a gentle corrective after hearing, for the first time, what would become The Prelude, remembering moments ‘When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received/ The light reflected as a light bestowed—’. (PW 401 ll. 18-19)
without power to irradiate. Wordsworth’s power has mysterious and unexamined origins, but in the sentence above, Coleridge takes the process back one stage further—to the source of power itself; before the child can act, she is a person acted on by her mother, who is a kind of irradiating force or light exerted on the child as object; but unlike mere objects, the child can respond.41

Coleridge provides us with a delightful illustration of this kind of relationship between child and mother in a note almost certainly based on observing the young Henry Gillman playing on the sea shore, accompanied by his mother, Anne. Henry had won Coleridge’s heart in the very earliest days of his residing with the Gillmans: having moved into their household on April 15th 1816, he was holidaying with them in September at Christchurch, near Bournemouth. In a letter written there, he describes Henry as an ‘infant Conchologist’ and ‘the dancing Sunspot of the Family… Child of the Sun… kissable Vagabond, and Comfort of his Mother’s Heart…’.42 Three years later, and in the same month he wrote the octosyllabics, he either remembers Henry’s shell collecting, or was inspired by a similar event at Ramsgate:

N.B. A Sonnet on the Child collecting shells and pebbles on the Sea shore or Lake side—and carrying each with a fresh shout of Delight and Admiration to the Mother’s Apron, who smiles and assents to each—There’s pretty! Is it not that a nice one?—and then when the Prattler is tired of its conchogzetetic labors, lifts up her apron and throws them out on the Sand—Such are our first discoveries both in Science and Philosophy—/ 43

How can the child’s play be conceived as of a kind with the investigations of a rational adult? We should not try and imagine these ‘discoveries’ in merely material terms: Coleridge dismissed what he called a ‘self-complaisant Carpenter’s Ruler Sort of Science’, or physics without metaphysics, as ‘Sight without Insight’.44 The life that the child imbues her toys with will not be merely the result of an investigation of the properties or qualities of the object, but be of a kind with the reality that Coleridge believed Wordsworth imbued nature, and which the scientist or philosopher should, in his view, imbue their discoveries in adulthood: sights must have their insights, or they will, in metaphysical terms, be bereft of meaning.

The mother in this note plays exactly the same role as in the verses of 1819 and 1828: she is the energizing background to the child’s play, the one to

41 ‘This creates the possibility of infinite regression, and thus the question of origin, but Coleridge’s answer is simple enough—the idea of God is mediated through the concepts of parenthood: why, he asks, ‘have men a Faith in God? There is but one answer: the Man, and the Man alone, has a Father and a Mother.’ (OM 122) Animals have biological progenitors: only mankind is capable of the concepts of Mother and Father, of which the idea of God is the origin and resolution.

42 CL IV 683-4

43 CN IV 4608. It is possible that CN IV 4623 is a draft of this proposed sonnet, as there are 15 lines of verse.

44 CN IV 5405; for further references to the same idea, see CL VI 630; LHP 80, 256; CL V 98. I imagine that this notion of sight without insight is based on the Cambridge Platonist distinction between the visible world, and the world realized through the recreation of forms within heart and mind.
whom the child turns and returns, who offers her approval—though reserved and fitted to the occasion—without which a child’s play would have no purpose, no focus. The process is everything: the outcome—the shells collected—is nothing, and in what looks like a hard-hearted gesture, she throws them away when the child has tired of the game. The things themselves are only important because of their approval by the mother. So the relationship between the mother and child established through and enabling the child’s activity is not only not dismissed, but made the symbol of the method by which the mature mind imbues discoveries in science and philosophy with meaning. As Peter Larkin points out, “Trust in these truths Coleridge associates with the parental voice, the “living warmth and pressure of the Mother.””

Following this prose explanation, Coleridge returns to verse, saying in a different way what he has said about Henry Gillman’s conchology:

Yet what she now attributes in her play,  
She shall hereafter, armed  
With steadfast stronger will, awake and find—  
For Metaphor and Simile  
Are notes of lisping prophecy—

What the playing child attributes to her toys are the metaphors and similes of the realities she will discover through the activity of her will as an adult. Coleridge emphasises ‘awake’ and ‘find’ in relation to the will, and it is likely that in the background is the waking of the will to, and the discovery of, the ideas of Reason, and the truths of religion, the commingled grounds of his philosophy. But in conjunction with this kind of waking, it is also a waking to the world in which the child plays and the adult lives: the God-created world which the act of imagination re-creates—the act without which ‘all this magnificent work would be a blank.’ (LPR 338-9). In the poem there is a break after the passage on philosophy, and the next section begins with the poet’s recognition of the created world:

Thanks, gentle Artist! now I can descry  
Thy fair Creation with a waking Eye,  
And all awake!

A Matron now, of sober mien

Tacitly anticipated in this discussion is the fact that throughout his poetry Coleridge’s representation of philosophy is always a figure, a person; and I can remember no instance when that person isn’t a woman. Here the figure is complex, both matron and child, but the child is ‘like a Gift from Heaven’, implying that heaven is still lying about her in her infancy. Wordsworth’s child

46 James Vigus points out that this figure is traditionally ‘Sophia’; but it is equally interesting, I think, that Coleridge never makes the connection, thus perhaps reviving the idea whilst revoking the cliché.
The Garden of Boccaccio

has no mother, but Coleridge’s has ‘but newly left a Mother’s knee’ thus the mother has to do with heaven, a guardian saint perhaps, like Christabel’s mother. And though the child has grown up to become a sober matron, she still has an uncorrupted radiance about her—‘no earthly sheen’. Thus the matron, once a child, has seemingly become the figure of her own mother—not quite earthly, and by implication, innocent. But the nature of her presence to the poet is in question: the matron was once ‘a faery child my Childhood woo’d’. Is he still wooing this mature figure as he wooed her when a child? Is she some form of ‘very self’, or only, as she is presented, a mere personification?

The problem of the origination of this figure is raised in ‘Constancy…’, in which ‘yearning Thought’, synonymous with philosophy, intermingles with an abstracted figure, who ‘though well I see,/She is not thou, and only thou art she,’ and who is imagined as a ‘dear embodied Good’, a ‘living Love’, may nonetheless still only be the shadow that he makes as he pursues the ‘image with a glory round its head’. In ‘Phantom or Fact?’ he acknowledges that this figure is probably an emanation of his being:

A lovely form there sate beside my bed,
And such a feeding calm its presence shed,
A tender love so pure from earthly leaven
That I unnethe the fancy might control
’Twas my own spirit newly come from heaven,
Wooing its gentle way into my soul! (PW 667)

Is this the sober matron, once a child? The ‘lovely form’ sits beside the poet’s bed, as a mother or lover might sit beside the bed of child or beloved, thus echoing the domestic intimacy of the figure of philosophy in ‘The Garden…’; she, if she it is, has ‘newly come from heaven’ (has ‘newly left a mother’s knee’), and is a spirit wooing the soul of the hapless poet with a ‘tender love… pure from earthly leaven’—that is ‘with no Earthly sheen’. Does she sit beside his bed, as Anne Gillman might have sat beside his desk, whose wooing was metamorphosed into a silent soothing, the creation of ‘a feeding calm’? What was mere ‘Thought’ in ‘Constancy…’, not a living love or ‘dear embodied Good’, has here become a ‘lovely form’ whose presence is spreading a pure and tender love over the soul of the poet. That this figure could also be the poet’s own spirit seems nothing but a hopeless narcissism, substantiating the fear of ‘Constancy…’, that we are stuck in a solipsistic world, ‘each in his prison/Thinking of the key’.47 But Coleridge’s key was the belief that what makes us specifically human, distinguished us from all kinds of animal, was universal, belonged equally to all, and might be the ground for the recognition of self in another—which, in principle, is his trinitarianism, love the mediating power. Could one discern this universality in another person, and thus their ‘very self’?

47 T S Eliot, The Wasteland, ll.412-13
Yes, was his answer, with the eyes of love, and he recorded such an experience in lines which first appear in a notebook of 1805:

All Look or Likeness caught from Earth,
All accident of Kin or Birth,
Had pass’d away; there was no trace
Of aught upon her brighten’d face
Uprais’d beneath that rifted Stone,
But of one Image—all her own!

She, She alone, and only She
Shone thro’ her body visibly.—

Like the matron of sober mien, whatever is shining through her body is of no earthly sheen, and yet it is her particular being. In 1804, when noting how ‘in one or two sweet Sleeps the Feeling has grown distinct and true, & at length has created its appropriate form, the very Isulia/’, he then refers to these lines, though there is no record of their existence before this note. The singular experience of ‘Phantom’ has here been realized through another method, which is the method, if that is the word, by which Sara’s form was to have been realized in ‘The Day Dream’—‘when I seem’d SURE my Love to see,/ Her very Self in her own quiet Home’. In fact, he is so confident that this insight into the very self is justified, that in February 1805 he is willing to expand on what he is discovering, and how it relates to those he loves, not just Sara Hutchinson:

... my feeling, in sleep, of exceeding great Love for my Infant/seen by me in the Dream/yet so that it might be Sara, Derwent or Berkley/ and still it was an individual babe and mine.

The paradoxical co-existence of the individual and the kind is asserted through the italics. But if ‘Love in Sleep’ is to be experienced

a certain indistinctness, a sort of universal-in-particularness of Form, seems necessary... [he then quotes ‘Phantom’ in full]. This abstract Self is indeed in its nature a Universal personified—as Life, Soul, Spirit, &c. Will not this prove it to be a deeper Feeling, & of such intimate affinity with ideas, so to modify them and become one with them...

(CN II 2441)

48 Peter Larkin, expresses a similar view in a slightly different way in discussing the Trinity: ‘being is mediated through the will in the form of the address of person to person.’ Wordsworth and Coleridge: Promising Losses, p. 213-4.
49 PW 347, ‘Phantom’. Coleridge headed the poem ‘Fragment of a Dream’ when he copied it into Sara Coleridge’s album in 1827. The final line of ‘Phantom or Fact...’ runs ‘...tis a record from the dream of life.’ The two poems are closely related, but the title ‘Phantom’ suggests only a negative reading, whereas it was undoubtedly a positive experience for Coleridge, who quotes or refers to it in CN II 2055, 2441 and CN III 3291.
50 CN II 2055
51 PW 294, ll.25-6
'Ideas' is no casual term, but describes the very groundwork of our humanity, the ideas of Reason, the educing of which is the primary work of the imagination, and what he means by philosophy, as opposed to observation.\footnote{CN IV 4692}

Coleridge has thus discovered that the transfigured individual may also substantiate the ideas which constitute philosophy, and that this person can either be an adult or a child, but must be loved to be realized as that figure. It is surely no co-incidence that though the figure beside his bed in 'Phantom or Fact?' is in one sense his own spirit, it was wooing its way into his soul, and that is there is a relation of love between them.

In ‘The Garden of Boccaccio’, it is therefore significant that philosophy is a figure, and not just a discipline, or a set of ideas imposing themselves on the poem, such as we find in, say, ‘Religious Musings’. Although it is only the ‘faery child’ that is woo’d, we can say with some certainty that the matron of sober mien would not be there were she not loved, because in Coleridge’s comparable conceptions, if she were not loved, she would not be a figure at all.

*The fair fulfilment of his poesy*

Coleridge’s poem to Mary Pridham, Derwent’s future wife, is tinged with a kindly jealousy when, addressing her as ‘Dear tho’ unseen…’ he confesses ‘That all, my glad eyes would grow bright to see/ My Derwent hath found realized in Thee!/… The fair fulfilment of his Poesy.’ (PW 638) To conclude this section, I want to consider whether we might see Anne Gillman as the fair, if silent, fulfilment of Coleridge’s poesy, the figure in whom philosophy and poetry momentarily combine to enable the creation of his only unrestrained romantic landscape, and possibly the happiest of his poems.

Mrs Gillman fulfills the first criterion easily enough—she is a matron, the mother of two children whose upbringing Coleridge influenced, especially Henry, who was wayward, but for whom he seems to have had an especial fondness. She is also radiant still, as he reveals in a notebook poem written some two years before ‘The Garden…’, which would develop into ‘The Two Founts’, a poem for Elizabeth Aders. This is the first stanza of two:

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A. G.
Was ne’er on earth Seen beauty like to this,
The concentrated satisfying Sight
In its deep quiet ask no further bliss
At once the form and Substance of Delight.  (CN IV 5368)
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The title is scored out, but we don’t know when or by whom. It is quite possible that by re-directing the poem—Elizabeth Aders was reputedly very beautiful, and received much flirtatious attention from Coleridge—he was deliberately leading his readers up the garden path. But given how it appears in the notebook, there seems no reason to believe that Mrs Gillman’s beauty did
not inspire the two stanzas recorded here. It is a beauty never seen on
earth—‘no Earthly sheen’, and there is a sufficiency in it—‘ask no further
bliss’.\(^\text{53}\) It has a quality—‘deep quiet’—that may remind us of her ‘quiet hand’,
and which may also reflect the foundational metaphor of ‘The Two Founts’, a
spring or fountain, the idea of which Coleridge frequently associates with Mrs
Gillman.\(^\text{54}\) Coleridge had a habit of using earlier poems to express later loves,
and he wrote a long note in Lucy Gillman’s copy of his Poetical Works 1828
comparing her with the fountain described in a poem of 1801:

This Fountain is an exact Emblem of what Mrs Gillman was by
Nature… No impurity from without, no alien ingredient in its own
composition, it was indeed a crystal Fount of Water undefiled—
But the Demand has been beyond the Supply… But God be
praised!—it is immortal…\(^\text{55}\)

Writing this paean to Mrs Gillman, Coleridge must have been conscious how
the poem ended: ‘Drink, Pilgrim, here! Here rest! and if thy Heart/ Be
innocent, here too thou shalt refresh/ Thy Spirit…’. Her beauty is a fountain
from which he can drink, be refreshed, and neither ask for nor need any
further bliss.

Mrs Gillman, like the child who became the radiant matron, is innocent—
no ‘impurity from without, no alien ingredient… a crystal Fount…
undefiled’—and innocence and purity are qualities that Coleridge always
attributes to the women who are for him a gateway to renovated bliss. Thus
he describes the power that will create ‘A new Earth & new Heaven’ for Sara
Hutchinson as ‘JOY, innocent Sara! Joy, that ne’er was given/ Save to the Pure,
& in their purest Hour’.\(^\text{56}\) The same qualities point to a different end in ‘The
Garden of Boccaccio’—as I have suggested not to the sublime or transcendent
‘Joy’, but to ‘Joyance’, a power of the senses, a power which first makes its
appearance, as the vision of the garden, immediately after Life is revealed to
the innocent figure of Poesy; that is, there is a collocation, but no direct
connection, between the innocent life and the revelation of the garden.

But because joyance is the product or educt of poesis, it requires, for
Coleridge, the condition of innocence, and so we must wonder whether he
considers himself innocent, and whether, unlike in his Verse Letter, he can
participate in the vision of life he celebrates. And despite the fact that even
before he met Mrs Gillman he fell in love with various women not his wife, he
does regard himself as innocent, and says so on several occasions: thus in a
note of 1826 he bemoans his condition while being encouraged to believe in
his innocence:

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\(^{53}\) The grammar of this is unclear: it could be a command; it could be that such beauty requires no further bliss.

\(^{54}\) See the headnote to PW 618 for that and the connection to PW 277.

\(^{55}\) PW 277 and headnote; the date of the poem is conjectural.

\(^{56}\) Quoted from CL II 798; he even addresses Mary Morgan in the same terms some years later: CL III 46.
Poor—embarrassed—sick—unpatronized, unread—/But (replied the soft consoling Friend) innocent. I felt only as one that recoils— & sinful dust and ashes that I am—groaning under self-reproached inapproaches!—I innocent? Be thankful still! (repeated the same so sweet Voice) you are an innocent man—Again I draw back but as a little child from a kind Stranger, but without letting go of the Stranger’s hand—

The consoling friend, also a stranger holding his hand, seems to be a composite figure who speaks with an unsourced authority, and it would be difficult not to see combined there both the sober matron, philosophy, newly come from heaven, and Mrs Gillman. 57

When he compared his relationship with Anne Gillman to that of Jacob and Rachel, he was thinking of the long service Jacob put in before Laban allowed him to marry Rachel. But the story has another aspect: Rachel finds she is barren—‘Give me children, or else I die’—and offers Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, ‘and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.’ Jacob duly obliges, and Coleridge, pondering this story, and surely conscious that for Jacob and Rachel he could read Samuel and Anne, noted ‘the absence of every manifestation, of every hint, phrase or incident from which the influence of mere sexual impulse or motive, could be inferred… the healthful unaltering plainness of the Narrative, the Nakedness, which the Spirit of Innocence translucent clothes [the Book of Genesis] as with a garment of Light.’ (CN V 6187, f.58). This is consistent with what he calls ‘the romantic incident of Lot’s Daughters’, in which their desire for children overcame the taboo of sleeping with their father—whom they got drunk for the purpose. Absence of sexual motivation in a questionable relationship is very important for Coleridge because it implies its innocence. Thus he and Anne Gillman attempted to square their circle. There are hints that James Gillman was too busy to attend closely to his wife’s spiritual and emotional needs, perhaps not well-fitted to the task, and that Anne Gillman turned to Coleridge, a wondrous necessary man, and he to her in his last ditch attempt to find ‘a home, an English home, and thee’. That, in effect, because she and her husband could have no spiritual children, she took, and perhaps he gave her to, this deeply communicative and fertile-minded man, so that their lives could flourish. That is speculation. What is certain is that Coleridge knew that ‘Life is revealed to Innocence alone’ and that he and Anne Gillman were innocent. The quality of life they knew in their innocence may be the substance of the second half of the poem.

57 CN IV 5275; also quoted, in full, by John Beer in ‘Coleridge’s Dramatic Imagination’, CB 29, Summer 2007, p.49, and by Peter Larkin, Promising Losses (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.210, in part, who comments on the fact that Coleridge continues to hold the stranger’s hand: ‘Voice itself is not tongue-tied but speaks in terms of a speaking-to, a voice prompting what cannot be self-authorized. It is this that Coleridge is acting out rather than simply ventriloquizing across an ontological chasm. The self does not maintain innocence but participates in having it voiced over towards itself.’
Mrs Gillman is unconscious of herself, and so is like the child philosophy, if not the matron she becomes. In a wonderful note of August 1826, Coleridge is pacing alongside the ivied wall that divides our Garden from Mr Nixon’s Kitchen Garden… and musing on the ordinary exclusive attribution of Reality to the phænomena of the passive sense… and on the impossibility that a Mind in this sensual Trance should attach any practical lively meaning to the Gospel Designation of a Christian as living a life of Grace by Faith… the Question started up in my mind—but must this knowledge be explicit, and be conveyed in the distinct conceptions. If so, what shall I think of such a woman as Mrs Gillman? Can I deny that she lives with God?

He is faced with a problem of his own making: as a philosopher and theologian he cannot accept that belief is not discrete and discursive; the whole cast of his intelligence, the function of philosophy historically, is to define and desynonimize, and therefore to render ideas or conceptions as distinct as possible. But this is not Mrs Gillman’s way: is she thus less of a Christian, or does she consequently not live with God? No! Coleridge answers emphatically, but his answer has a peculiar solution: his eyes, he says, were at that moment dwelling on the lovely Lace-work of those fair Elm-trees… and I received the solution of my difficulty, flashlike, in the word BEAUTY! in the intuition of the Beautiful—This too is spiritual—and the Goodness of God this is shorthand, Hieroglyphic of Truth—the mediator between Truth and Feeling, the Head and the Heart—The Sense [of] Beauty is implicit knowledge… tho’ with the consciousness not successively unfolded! (CN IV 5428)

He is wandering, we might think, through his homely Eden, with his Eve or Rachel in mind, if not beside him. Beauty as the mediator between truth and feeling, head and heart; the sense of beauty as implicit, not explicit, knowledge: are not these statements just what Coleridge was meaning when he said that in poesy, philosophy—truth, the head, and poetry—feeling, the heart, ‘interpenetrate, and mutually co-inhere’, and that therefore beauty as implicit knowledge is one and the same as poesy—the flower and fragrance of all human knowledge—and that all poesy is thus contained in the word ‘beauty’? And can it be a co-incidence that this solution came to him as he was thinking of Mrs Gillman, whose beauty is for him ‘the form and substance of Delight’?

Behind the figure of the child and matron of lines 45-56, I think we can see Mrs Gillman as a figure perfected. She has, even if only in the moment of writing, met all the criteria that would make her the fair fulfilment of Coleridge’s poesy. In perceiving her beauty, he perceives her ‘very Self’, the truth of her being, and the source of his delight; she is innocent, and lives with God, and so may be considered ‘newly come from heaven’; she is not self-conscious, thus truth and feeling combine in her as they combine in a child,
without awareness of the division that Coleridge knew so destructive of poesy; she intuits the truths and ideas that are the substance of philosophy and religion.

But she is also a real presence, a matron about the house, sympathetic, soothing the poet in a shared silence; she is a ‘dear embodied Good’, a ‘living Love’ who has proved herself at one with Thought, so that Coleridge can gainsay the doubts of ‘Constancy…’ that ‘She is not thou…’. She is both the perfect figure and the perfect presence, for she is to Coleridge a real person and an implicit knowledge, simultaneously embodied and transfigured. He has a home, and English home, and her. All is set fair for the resurrection of Life.

IV

And Nature makes her happy Home with Man

Coleridge’s powerful but suppressed consciousness of Anne Gillman combines with an ideal landscape to create a world in which to be. The third stage of his recovery involves a transition from consciousness of the picture to existence in the world the picture portrays. So his business with the picture complete, he bids goodbye to its creator with the lines we have already met: ‘Thanks, gentle Artist! now I can descry/ Thy fair creation with a waking Eye/ And all awake.’ This is clearly a different mode of consciousness to that in which ‘an idle Eye’ gazed on the picture ‘with silent might.’ The ‘all’ of ‘… all awake’ is emphasized, and should be contrasted not only with the day-dream condition of the second stage, but with the language describing his initial mood of dejection—‘weary’, ‘emptied’, ‘alone’, ‘numbing’, and ‘all else slumb’ring’. The waking eye all awake is the eye of someone who has just appeared at a party, and preparing to join in. And this is just what Coleridge does: gazing here, wandering there, praising the green arches, stooping ‘with that serviceable Nymph’ to scoop water from the fountain, this partially detached observation gives way to Coleridge’s fullest stage of recovery: ‘I see no longer! I myself am there,’ perhaps echoing Keats’ ‘Already with thee!’, and then he sits ‘on the Ground-sward’, and shares the banquet. He goes on to emphasize his participation by asserting his active role: ‘Tis I, that sweep that Lute’s love-echoing Strings,/ And gaze upon the Maid who gazing Sings’—perhaps itself an echo of his consciousness of Anne Gillman, whose singing Coleridge admired, and in whose admiration Anne delighted.58 The deep relief that Coleridge feels at being in this world is wonderfully expressed in the last two lines of the section:

With old Boccaccio’s Soul I stand possest
And breathe an Air like life, that swells my Chest.

58 CN IV 4721; and Paul Cheshire, ‘An Obliterary Study’, p.15
Again, the seat of his sense of life is his chest. But this is life in its fullness—he is breathing deep and breathing true; he is, one might say, inspired. And his inspiration, his becoming at one with the life he only at first observed, is at least partly realized through his sense that another person’s soul, Boccaccio’s, has possessed his—that his being has been subsumed in the consciousness of another. And this enables the final transformation of the poem, from consciousness of the genteel world of the picture, to consciousness of Boccaccio and his works. If Coleridge’s consideration of Northern Romance is tinged with austerity, with the purity of purpose that allowed him to see the skalds as akin to the reformers, his celebration of Southern Romance, and of Florence in particular, is a celebration of all the gorgeous fertility of a natural, cultured life:

Thou brightest Star of Star-bright Italy!
Rich, ornate, populous, all treasures thine,
The golden Corn, the Olive, and the Vine.
Fair cities, gallant Mansions, Castles old…
Gardens, where flings the Bridge its airy Span,
And Nature makes her happy Home with Man…

… that last line one of the loveliest, and the happiest, in the poem. In this section one could say there is ‘Rhythm is all thought, and Joyance every where’. Here nature and man are natural allies, and there is no sense that a man beginning in natural impulse is at risk of creating some kind of false or phantom self. This celebration, this being in a world in which Coleridge feels happy, free and inspired, might have concluded the poem. But there is a further movement—from the general celebration of life to a more particular celebration of love. Possessed of Boccaccio’s soul, Coleridge’s praise is unfettered:

Thine all Delights, and every Muse is thine;
And more than all, the Embrace and Interwine
Of All with All in gay and twinkling Dance!
Mid Gods of Greece and Warriors of Romance,

There is a wonderful plurality here—‘… every Muse is thine’—think what praise that is: where has the poetry of ‘the God Wordsworth’ gone to? And this from the man who once declared ‘the gross and disgusting licentiousness… rendered the Decamerone of Boccace… fit to be classed among the enemies of the human Race…’ , which reminds me of Eliot’s comment on D H Lawrence, ‘rotten and rotting others’.

And note how the genteel courtly gazing has metamorphosed into a coupling-like dance. Coleridge then gives Homer a passing nod, but moves quickly on to his real interest. ‘Ovid’s Holy Book of

59 LL II 95; for T S Eliot’s remark see Penguin Critical Anthologies, D H Lawrence, p.264
Love’s sweet Smart! peers priapically from a fold in Boccaccio’s mantle; to this line Coleridge attached a note telling a story from Boccaccio’s *Il Filocopo*, much like the story of Paolo and Francesca, but without the complication of adultery—thus innocent. His marginal comment on this passage runs: ‘Deeply interesting—but observe… The holy Book, Ovid’s Art of Love.—This is not the result of mere Immorality.’ And then underneath, two lines of verse, ‘Multum, Multum, Hic jacet sepultum’—Much, Much, Here lies buried.’ What lies buried is of course the question, and George Whalley suggests that it is Boccaccio’s re-introduction of Greek and Roman writers to medieval Italy. But this was not buried, so I think Coleridge had something else in mind.

I suggest that we look back to his understanding of an Idyll, to *The Song of Songs*, and to the story of Jacob and Rachel in *Genesis*, his paradigm of innocent fidelity. In coming to believe, from an initial scepticism, that the songs of Solomon might represent the Messiah’s ‘Communion with the Soul,’ Coleridge was in principle accepting ‘the holiness of the heart’s affections’, that the journey from sense to spirit was possible, and not, as he asserted in the *Opus*, a route barred by the creation of a false and phantom self. And if in this Ovidian landscape Coleridge has found Nature making her happy home with Man, an Eden in which he can wander freely, here we might say is also the beginning of a story, of a narrative which might culminate in the union of Idea and Fact, faithful portraiture and poetic Vision—which thus has the potential to realize the truths of religion.

Boccaccio’s world, the world of Romance, is not one Coleridge wishes to leave: nothing tolls him back to the loneliness of his desk—and he praises Boccaccio with words that remind us of the function of the imagination:

*O all-enjoying and all-blending sage
Long be it mine to con thy mazy page…*

The ‘mazy page’ recalls the ‘mazy motion’ of a sacred river through another garden—issuing there from a mighty fountain; and though here the fountain is more civilized, we should not forget Coleridge’s frequent association of fountains with Anne Gillman, with love, revived in this poem in the line, ‘Fountains, where Love lies listening to their falls.’ And yet, despite the fact that he has no wish to leave the garden, Coleridge seems to recede from active participation, from his sweeping of the ‘Lute’s love-echoing strings’, and return to the role of observer; and this slightly uncomfortable sense of his being there voyeuristically is given some substance by the last line of the poem, which reminds Morton Paley of ‘Mr Apollinax’, whom Eliot likens to ‘Priapus in the shrubbery/Gaping at the lady in the swing’; here we see a ‘sly Satyr peeping through the leaves!’—perhaps gazing on the lady who gazing sings.60 The poem

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60 ‘Mr Apollinax’ is based on Bertrand Russell (Eliot *Letters* 483), who had an affair with Eliot’s wife. Morton Paley seems to imply a connection between the satyr here and one of Coleridge’s nom de plume, Satyrane. But Satyrane rescues Una in Book 1 of *The Faery Queene*, and re-appears as ‘Idoloclastes Satyrane’ in ‘A Tombless Epitaph’ (455). Coleridge consistently thinks of him as having a kind of savage honesty and a fearless upright spirit. This is not what we attribute to the satyr peeping through the leaves.
thus ends on a not quite comfortable note, or only comfortable for those happy with their satyristic instincts.

V

… the Only Sure Friend of Declining Life

I would like to think of Coleridge staying on in Boccaccio’s garden, surrounded by ‘all Delights’ and ‘every Muse’, as he stayed on in Highgate, glad of Mrs Gillman’s companionship, no doubt sometimes gazing at her when she sang. But the war in his soul between Kantian duty and private inclination, between philosophy as a discipline and Boccaccian or poetic power was not over. Perhaps the fact that his belovéd was another man’s wife, that it was a relationship that could have no formal or public admittance, that it was silent, prevented him from resting quietly in that garden. Affective power depended for him, as he believed it did for the growing child, on a conscious interchange of sympathy, and a relationship which had no formal existence was probably insufficient, certainly unreliable, and as a final condition of life, unsustainable.

Thus he was constantly plagued by the kinds of fear that underpin ‘Work without Hope’. Poetic examples occur throughout the 1820s and were probably occasioned by the very quality in Mrs Gillman that made her such an effective muse—her silence, the uspeakingness of her devotion. In 1824, four years before ‘The Garden…’, he set down some lines in a notebook that he will later connect with ‘Love’s Apparition and Evanishment’ (PW 688) and which are in substance akin to the concluding lines of ‘The Pang More Sharp than All’—‘O pang all pangs above/ Is kindness counterfeiting absent Love’. It is typical of Coleridge’s self-obscuring confessional verses in that it is difficult to tell whether he is talking about himself, someone else, or merely making an observation:

Idly we supplicate the Powers above!
There is no Resurrection for a Love
That unperturb’d, unshadowed, wanes away
In the chill’d heart by inward self-decay.
Poor Mimic of the Past! The Love is o’er
That must resolve to do what it did itself of yore. (CN IV 5146)

We would have no context in which to place these lines were not a single word—‘mistaken’—written vertically beside them, on the right hand side. It is, according to Kathleen Coburn, ‘a cramped instance’ of Mrs Gillman’s hand.61 It would seem then that she has read them as addressed to her, a complaint that her love for the poet is decaying, and that she is substituting deliberation

61 Silently disagreeing with Kathleen Coburn, Jim Mays believes that this is Coleridge’s hand, which if correct would open up another line of interpretation, suggesting that he was acknowledging that his complaint was unfounded. See PW II ii 1222 n.6
for the lost energy of her soul.\textsuperscript{62} We don’t know when she wrote that word, and it is therefore quite possible that Coleridge never saw it, and never had the chance of reversing his fear, or realizing her devotion. On the other hand, there is a chance that he both saw and responded. On the opposite page there are four lines headed ‘Item’. As Jim Mays points out in his headnote to PW 597, the Latin reading of this is “just so” or “likewise”. But I think we can see these lines as the positive obverse of his complaint:

\begin{quote}
Desire, of pure Love born, itself’s the same:
A Pulse, that animates the outer frame,
It but repeats the life-throb of the Heart—
And takes the impress of the nobler part.
\end{quote}

It is one of those instances in which the original notebook might be telling us much more than a transcription permits us to see. The two sets of verses are opposite each other, with Mrs Gillman’s ‘mistaken’ written vertically between them. This has become a dialogue: ‘You don’t love me as you used to.’ ‘Yes I do.’ ‘Then you would feel desire for me.’ If love comes first, then desire is pure, as was Rachel’s for Jacob, and symbolizes the ‘life-throb of the Heart’, the will unreserved and dedicated.\textsuperscript{63} But if there is no desire, then volition takes over and kindness begins to counterfeit that absent form of love. Unsurprisingly, if this dialogue did take place, Anne Gillman chose not to respond to these four lines, and Coleridge published them separately from the first six.\textsuperscript{64}

Two years later, in 1826, Coleridge revisits this kind of debate in ‘Duty, Surviving Self-love…’. (PW 627) That it has connections with Mrs Gillman is only evident from a prose introduction which Coleridge chose not to publish. Two characters, ‘Alia’ and ‘Constantius’ enter into a dialogue, the substance of which is Alia’s question, ‘Are you the happier for your Philosophy?’ and Constantius’ response, ‘The calmer at least, and less unhappy... for it has enabled me to find, that selfless Reason is the best Comforter and only sure Friend, of declining Life.’ This is something of a put-down. You’re no comforter—you are ‘Alia’—with the connotations of ‘alien’ and ‘other things’, interested only in domestic life, something Coleridge records sceptically as their conversation is interrupted by ‘the sound of a Carriage, followed by the usual bravura executed on the brazen Knocker, announced a Morning Visit, and Alia hastened to receive the Party.’

Constantius, constant to an ideal object, Reason, retires to his room and mumbles out the poem he never claimed as poetry, only thoughts ‘\textit{punctuated}

\textsuperscript{62} Coleridge may have been in the habit of leaving his notebook open for his beloveds to read: see Paul Cheshire’s, ‘An Obliterary Study’, this issue, p.5

\textsuperscript{63} The phrase ‘life-throb’, apart from its obviously sexual connotations, might take us back to the ‘lifefull Glee’ of ‘The Garden…’. What is ‘Life’ to Coleridge is a very open question, but the senses in full swing—as in ‘The Garden…’, inspired by ‘Boccaccio’s Spirit warm’—is one answer he lets slip intermittently.

\textsuperscript{64} Paul Cheshire has suggested (email, 18/5/12) that even the heading to this note might be an invitation to Anne Gillman to comment: ‘24. April 1824. <n.b. composed extempore, without taking my pen off the paper. Q. Will they stand a second Reading?>’ The brackets are editorial, indicating that the comment was inserted later.
with rhymes’—another instance of a poem dismissed becoming one of his best-known later works. He begins by saying that though he sees ‘all changed without’ he is ‘unchanged within’, and so he wonders ‘… why at others’ Wanings should’st thou fret? This poorly explained sense of desertion becomes the ground on which his sense of duty is to act, and his words carry us back to how he believes a mother’s love irradiates the life of a child, enabling her to prattle and play with the world: ‘While, and on whom, thou mays’st—shine on! nor heed,/ Whether the Object by reflected light/ Return thy radiance, or absorb it quite…’.

Perhaps by heeding his own advice he kept alive whatever it was that he and Mrs Gillman shared, for two years later ‘The Garden of Boccaccio’ burst into life, a blooming that I sense took him by surprise, as had Kubla Khan, but which he consequently shuffled off as a mere ‘Copy of Verses’. In my opinion it is nothing of the sort, but rather a celebration of Life as Coleridge always wanted to know it, but which his circumstances, largely of his own making, never really permitted.

So his happy marriage of philosophy and poetry, of head and heart, idea and sense, was a momentary union, and as Life burnt dimmer and dimmer, and old friends declined further, Coleridge took refuge more and more in the distinction between the will of Reason and the creaturely will, as he calls it. Two years after writing ‘The Garden of Boccaccio’ he consents to this distinction in a fearfully honest piece of self-analysis. The search for the sympathy he so much wanted, what he called ‘…my inmost All—/ Faith in the Faith of The Alone Most Dear!’ he came to see as a detachment ‘from the leading strings… of the moral Reason [involving] the immersion in and the modification by, the creaturely Will, the Life and Mind of the Flesh.’ Though he is ostensibly talking about ‘the amiable tendencies of the comparatively best-natured Individuals’, we see when he describes one of their predominant traits as ‘the yearning to be beloved, the craving for sympathy’, he is really talking about himself. The process by which such persons evoke sympathy he describes—note the significant first phrase—as ‘the day dreams… the little tricks, and tricky imaginations, by which the creaturely will subjectively realizes for itself the sense of being beloved.’ He calls the whole business ‘Selfishness’ because ‘the Self is not only the starting point from, but the Goal, to—which the Soul is working during such moments—’ Thus ‘[t]he whole procedure… is anti-redemptive—… It has the true mark of the Hades—Contradiction, falsehood—for the Devil (=the Will of the Ground, the Apostate Spirit) was a Liar from the Beginning, said the Word of Truth…’ (CN V 6444)

So Coleridge pressed on, now in the service of Reason, Duty and the Absolute, all children of the sober matron, Philosophy, but de-personalized, de-figured. Though, like Wordsworth, he believed that our home is with

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65 ‘The difference between Coleridge’s inner and outer weather is glossed by a sentence in the prose introduction: ‘And the smile of Constantius was as the Light from a purple Cluster of grapes of the Vine gleaming thro’ snow-flakes…’
66 ‘The Eolian Harp’ was always one of Coleridge’s favourite poems, because it aims at, and perhaps achieves, a sense of the union of all forms of life, symbolized in his briefly happy marriage, of which the poem is a prothalamion. For Coleridge’s life-long involvement with this poem see ‘The Eolian Harp’, Paul Cheshire, CB 17, Summer 2001.
infinity and only there, his projected path homeward was quite different. Wordsworth’s transcendental consciousness is embedded in and described by certain images of nature; Coleridge consistently portrays the transfigured person as the voice of heaven. These transfigured people are at the heart of a process of regeneration in their respective poems, his guardian saints. If the product of Coleridge’s personal experience, these poems often take the shape of odes; but when they are not, when perhaps philosophy and poetry are acting in unified innocence, they are ballads or romances. And this is perhaps the central point about Coleridge as a poet—his genius was narrative, and his transcendentalism, his tendency to transfigure people, fed the regenerative core of his narration; it is perhaps no co-incidence that his long projected poem, ‘The Fall [or Siege] of Jerusalem’, would have had Christ as its hero, Jesus transfigured, and that it is of course a title closely but antithetically related to one of the great poems of the Romance genre, *Gerusalemme Liberata*. However, in failing to integrate his creaturely will with the absolute will, in failing to find a path that might body up to spirit work, he resigns the task for which he of all the poets called Romantic was perhaps best fitted—the revival of English narrative poetry, the recovery of a Romance that might lead to Religion.  

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67 CL II 877, TT 28 April 1832
68 I have claimed this poem as an ode; rhyming couplets may seem to fit ill with that description, but the verse is not as regular as the form implies, and could be presented more as one might expect an ‘irregular’ ode to be presented; so, for instance, ll.46-56 might be laid out thus:

And last, a Matron now, of sober mien
   Yet radiant still
   And with no earthly sheen,
   Whom as a faery child my Childhood woo’d
   Even in my Dawn of Thought—
   PHILOSOPHY,
   Though then unconscious of herself, pardie,
   She bore no other name than POESY;
   And, like a Gift from Heaven,
   In lifeful Glee,
   That had but newly left a Mother’s knee,
   Prattled and play’d
   With Bird and Flower and Stone,
   As if with elfin Playfellows well known
   And Life revealed to Innocence alone.