

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

THE INTERPENETRATION OF MAN
AND NATURE

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THE subject of my lecture, in Coleridge's phrase, 'the interpenetration of man and nature', was chosen for two reasons among others: I think Coleridge has something pertinent to us to say on this subject, and I believe it is a neglected aspect of his thought.

When Picasso was asked by the first reporter who climbed up to his studio after the liberation of France how he had found it possible to carry on through the war with his painting, he said, 'Art stabilizes us on the verge of chaos.'

And so, in days when our little earth is going through the contradictions, on the one hand of shrinking daily, more and more closely knit by multiple communications, and yet, at the same time, of hitherto inconceivably expanding, being carried into larger and larger orbits of fear, or joy, or whatever sort of excitement our temperaments bring to a new awareness of the vast, it is perhaps not irrelevant to examine the highly articulate responses to the physical world of a poetic and analytic imagination of the order of Coleridge's. In fact it proves almost weirdly relevant—to look at his sense of space, time, and motion, his world of the elements—of water, earth, fire, and air—and I should like to do this as simply and directly as possible, in the poems themselves and the notebooks.

Coleridge's responses to the phenomenal world have not, so far as I know, been fully examined and interpreted, nor is this the time to try to deal fully with the rich materials. Yet to raise the subject allows me to air a conviction that in this direction lie some of his most vital and persistent preoccupations.

In his twenty-fourth year he proposed 'Hymns to the Sun, the Moon, and the four Elements'—six hymns.

Seven years later, in 1803, there were eight Hymns in the scheme, God and Man having been added as subjects. By 1821—and for so long and longer did the abortive plan haunt both his conscience and his wishes—by 1821, his fortieth year, the

number had been reduced again, to seven, Spirit having been substituted for God, and Man omitted.

The reasons why the Hymns aborted may be multifarious. Too much book-work perhaps: too much Synesius, Thomas Burnet, Newton, and Dr. Isaac Watts. One of the hymns was to have introduced 'a dissection of Atheism', and another 'a bold avowal of Berkeley's System'. To quote the late Professor Lowes, 'they would have been, it is sadly safe to say, a monstrous birth'.

Was the form 'Hymn' a deterrent? Certainly the reconciliations being attempted in the form may have been awkward. A 'Hymn to Dr. Darwin—in the manner of the Orphics' was another proposal. Now a hymn to Dr. Erasmus Darwin, in whatever manner, Orphic or other, would necessarily have been a pretty mundane affair; but then, even Godwin and Lord Stanhope were hailed by Coleridge 'with ardent hymn', and his Ottery St. Mary pixies sing hymns; altogether, his term is a loose one, to say the least. The formal intention, however, could scarcely matter less, nor indeed the failure of the projected poems to emerge from their Jove's head as hymns. What is important is that they provided some basic materials for *The Ancient Mariner*; and that an interest in the elements became an important part of Coleridge's intellectual and emotional equipment. Lowes's theory about the failure to complete the Hymns is that 'Coleridge the poet was still "struggling, like a limed bird"', in the clutches of Coleridge the metaphysician'. He sees the Hymns suffocated by Godwin, Berkeley, Tom Paine, and even by Thales and Aristotle. To my mind these and other poems of still-birth were stifled much more by the poet's struggle with illness, and with himself as prodigal son, errant brother, inadequate husband and father, than by the philosopher in him. But this is beside the point here. Perhaps Coleridge the critic, too, helped to stifle verses that might too easily have succumbed to that weakness for 'effusion' to which some of his most youthful poems bear witness, and which the taste of the time too readily countenanced. I should go so far as to suggest, too, that the very quickening of his direct observations, and his response to the physical world, operated perhaps at cross-purposes to the artificial design of the Hymns.

From the time the poet awakens in Coleridge until the end, some of the most riveting phrases in the poems and the notebooks come from tingling responses to the physical world, spontaneously felt on the pulses, seen, heard, smelt, touched, and given a special Coleridgian contraction or expansion, a twist

of pathos, or pleasure, or association. One thinks, for instance, of the moment at Stowey when he looked up from his book and down at his feet, and exchanged for the bookish dream of exotic creatures in the Carolinas, as described by Bartram, the heart-warming sight of the yellow Somerset furze, and the comforting thought that it was 'never-bloomless'. The pleasure, with its recognition of the faithfulness, if one may so put it, the endurance of the flower on a sparse heath, is conveyed in the lines in which, a few months, or perhaps a few days, later, the phrase appeared:

The hills are heathy, save that swelling slope
Which hath a gay and gorgeous covering on,
All golden with the never-bloomless furze.

The experiencing of the furze was sharp; in Scotland five years afterwards he missed it from another heathy landscape, and in Italy eight years later he noticed it with nostalgia. There are records of many such moments, painful as well as pleasant. Such as the one when in the Trossachs he suddenly saw in nature, with fresh perception, what he had doubtless seen often enough before, Jeremy Taylor's stick-bent-in-the-water image. He had read Taylor in an earlier period of loneliness and misunderstanding and the impact on him now in his loneliness and temporary unhappiness with the Wordsworths was instantaneous—

My words and actions imaged in his mind, distorted and snaky, as the Boatman's Oar reflected in the Lake—

Coleridge's experiences of the physical world could not be more directly and completely personal.

Theoretically, the Hymns as a form ought to have provided just that movement from inner to outer, outer to inner world, that 'interpenetration' of which he speaks; actually, this takes place best when the elements participate in an externalized drama like the *Mariner's*, or in conversation-pieces like *Frost at Midnight*, or *This Lime Tree Bower*. Or when they are antiphonal to some action, as in *Dejection*, where the suppressed storm in the heart is paralleled by the one outdoors, 'of mountain birth', that provides so magnificent a description of a Cold Front. Obviously the projected 'Hymns to the Elements' did not 'call the whole soul into activity'. The mere hymning of the elements was inadequate, for some such reason as lay behind Keats's bold remark: 'The Sun, the Moon, the Earth and its contents are material to form greater things, that is, ethereal things—greater things than the Creator himself made.'

We have all, I imagine, at some time or other been under the spell of the Ancient Mariner as his drama moves back and forth repeatedly from the sea and skyscape of the natural world to the soulscape of the Mariner. At the beginning of the poem there is the tension between the inner compulsion he suffers, and the festivity-bent wedding guest. Then, in a marvellous progress (through various states of wilfulness, agony, terror, loneliness, despair, remorse, love for the beauty of the water snakes, release, homecoming, and a kind of reconciliation to life)—at each stage of the inner drama, the elements come in: the stormblast, the ice, the south wind, the slimy calm—so that the struggle of the Mariner and the life of sea, air, and sky participate in one another and in one complex action.

The sun's rim dips, the stars rush out,
At one stride comes the dark,
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre bark—
We listen'd and looked sideways up,
Fear at my heart as at a cup
My life-blood seemed to sip!

The attention is first drawn outwards, to the sun, the sudden dark, the stars, the whisper. Then inwards, to the Mariner's fear, described in the homely intimate image of a cup being sipped at. The bridge between, the pivot on which the turn from outer to inner is made, is (a) the far-hearing of the whisper, and (b) the listening and looking 'sideways up', that is to say, the senses of the Mariner. (Incidentally, the 'far-heard whisper' was a version substituted for 'never a whisper' as a result of actual experience—hearing the cocks crowing from one ship to another in convoy on his Malta journey.)

Many things here might be commented on, but what I am interested to point out at the moment is that the whole poem proceeds on this perpetual sea-like surge back and forth from outer to inner worlds; and not only the dramatic action of the poem, but at least some of its larger meanings as well.

Thus one relation between the inner world of the Mariner's feelings and the outside world of the elements lies in acute observation, sharpened by fear, love, awe, the varying states of emotion, made articulate in the tale by the Mariner's compulsion to talk, in the poem by Coleridge's as yet unblocked ability to release his observations. The two worlds become one dramatic action, of which the elements are what Coleridge was later to call 'the Exponent'.

But another aspect of the drama of the poem and of this inner-outer relation, and one which has always given critics more trouble and wider differences of opinion, is the supernatural aspect, the Polar Spirit and its fellow daemons represented by the two Voices, the unprecedented movement of the ship, the angelic troop and its seraph lights, and so on. Coleridge has more than hinted in the *Biographia Literaria* that all this was part of the plan to familiarize the unfamiliar. The superstitious fancies endemic to sailors were being used in the poem both as machinery for the action and as the means of educating the Mariner out of that graceless state of estrangement from his universe. Coleridge had a theory about the efficacy of the fantasies of primitive minds in the process of unconscious adaptation to a rational view of the phenomenal world, and a true feeling for it. In *The Destiny of Nations*, he is writing of the Laplander watching the Aurora Borealis:

. . . Fancy is the power
That first unsensualises the dark mind,
Giving it new delights; and bids it swell
With wild activity; and peopling air,
By obscure fears of Beings invisible,
Emancipates it from the grosser thrall
Of the present impulse, teaching Self-Control,
Till Superstition with unconscious hand
Seat reason on her throne. Wherefore not vain,
Nor yet without permitted power impressed,
I deem those legends terrible . . .

So far as the poetry here is concerned, one may, I suppose, legitimately regret that the promised prose essay on the supernatural had not been written instead; however, in its absence, we do well to take these lines seriously, with their rational anthropological view of man's relation to the universe, chiefly I suggest of its inescapableness, of the sense of the inevitability of its laws.

For Coleridge, then, at least two avenues of interpenetration between man and nature are open and conspicuous, and perhaps embrace all others: first, the direct awareness, through all the senses, of the physical world, with such extensions and intensifications as conceptual thinking adds; and second, those dimmer imaginings, apperceptive searchings for meanings and portents, laws and relations, such as are prefigured in primitive beliefs and more sophisticatedly developed in the poetic and scientific imagination. In *The Ancient Mariner* the two avenues

or levels are used, the elements and the 'legends terrible'. The Mariner is an individual telling of weird and harrowing particular events; he is also Everyman, in a common human predicament, like Hamlet coping with an inner and an outer problem, and like him acting out, and being acted upon by, a process of education of the imagination.

In *Christabel* a similar diastolic process is going on. The action moves from the chill darkness and eeriness of the night and the forest, to the darker, colder eeriness of Christabel's fears and prayers.

The night is chill; the forest bare;
 Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
 There is not wind enough in the air
 To move away the ringlet curl
 From the lovely lady's cheek—
 There is not wind enough to twirl
 The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
 That dances as often as dance it can,
 Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
 On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Except for the mossed oak, the forest is an ungenial place—'friendship is a sheltering tree', he said elsewhere. The windlessness affects the lady's curl and the one red leaf. Note the difference. The leaf is light, high up—at night almost a thing of the heavens rather than the earth—prone to dance—whereas the lady, fastened to earth, a damp, chill earth, is heavy-hearted and far from dancing. The natural world is enviable: in its own place, subject to seasonal and diurnal change, but not faltering like the lady, not subject to surprises. The leaf, exposed and solitary on the topmost twig, dances, but Christabel's heart, exposed to the loneliness of the night and the strangeness of her situation, beats too fast.

Hush! beating heart of Christabel!
 Jesu, Maria, shield her well!

Her world and the world of nature (the objective facts and the subjective fantasies) are interlocked. There is a process of growing awareness in her, as in the Mariner, an education through terror, horror, disillusion, rejection, loneliness, doubt; but the required union of inner and outer worlds was here never consummated, its law never ascertained. Coleridge, for personal reasons, could not find, nor even by happy accidents of semi-conscious selection hit upon, the appropriate external exponent. There were three possible fates for Christabel: death, a happy

reconciliation with father and lover, or a sort of Lady of Shalott mirror-existence. The first was impossible for Coleridge to accept as the resolution of his own inner conflict (assuming, as I have argued elsewhere, that her conflicts are a paradigm of the poet's own). The second—reconciliations in personal life—was beyond his dreams and hopes. The third, the recluse-mirror solution, involved an excommunication from the continuing relation of self to phenomena, inner to outer worlds, a relation which, as I am trying to show, Coleridge's belief and experience required.

Kubla Khan shows a similar interpenetration of fantasied and natural, acting and suffering worlds, and perhaps the reason why Coleridge—though not all of us—felt it an incomplete poem, is the irresoluteness of that interpenetration. It is a poem of wonderful oscillation (to use Miss Schneider's splendid word for it) between the sense of creativity and the negation of it, between joy and fear, between hope and loss, positive and negative poles, but across the deep romantic chasm—the chasm between the king-emperor-architect-poet and his projected pleasure-dome—the vision of the damsel with the dulcimer is a mirage; symphony and song are not revived and the sunny dome is not built. The natural world here is the most tenuous, amorphous, least real, most mysterious of any in the three great poems, and whatever the cause, opium or other, the loss is destructive of Coleridge's intent, or at least of his own sense of the wholeness of the poem.

In those lovely neglected lines in *The Garden of Boccaccio* where, he says,

. . . bereft alike of grief and glee
I sate and cower'd o'er my own vacancy

he is brought out of himself by an engraving showing Boccaccio's garden. It affected him gradually,

Like flocks adown a newly-bathéd steep
Emerging from a mist; or like a stream
Of music soft that not dispels the sleep,
But casts in happier moulds the slumberer's dream,
Gazed by an idle eye, with silent might
The picture stole upon my inward sight.
A tremulous warmth crept gradual o'er my chest,
As though an infant's finger touched my breast.
And one by one (I know not whence) were brought
All spirits of power that most had touched my thought.

He begins to recite these 'powers'—the wonders of the world, of man, of poetry, of philosophy. Thus awakened to wander in what he describes as Boccaccio's Eden, he suddenly is released first from vacancy, and then from mere spectatorship,

I see no longer, I myself am there.
 Sit on the ground-sward, and the banquet share,
 'Tis I that sweep the lute's love-echoing strings
 And gaze upon the maid who gazing sings.

He breathes 'an air like life', and feels 'the brightness of the world' of an older, freer Italy, and the poem ends with lines that suggest his joy in the permanence of art.

Now it is evident that many factors drew Coleridge out of his despondency to write this poem; but when he describes what the releasing process felt like to him, it is like the sight of a flock of sheep emerging through a mist in a Quantock coomb or on a Cumberland fell, or a stream of soft music, or the feel of a baby's finger on the breast. There is a sense in which at this moment in the poem these three experiences of sight, sound, and touch become one experience, all focusing on the one point, the releasing of the self out of the vortex of isolation into the larger world of nature, art, and human kind—in short, into the world of creative possibilities.

If it be argued that every poet has needed to draw upon natural phenomena for his materials, that here is nothing peculiar to Coleridge, the rejoinder is that we are not speaking of the use of these merely for background, or analogy, or devices. The point is that Coleridge's relation to the physical world, often referred to as his sensibility, or his great skill in observation, is more than that. It is a profound part of his total vision of life, essential to it. When he feels able to penetrate the natural world, imaginatively, or feels penetrated by it, so that he is free and articulate in it, he can write *The Ancient Mariner*; when he cannot feel it penetrating him he writes, in *Dejection*, 'I see, not *feel*, how beautiful they are'; and in that last poem the very effort of seeing and imagining does give some release from self into the larger world of his love for a steadfast friend, the 'exponent' of which is found at the end in the overhanging stars. It is this felt need for such interpenetration, increasingly felt by him as a *need*, with which I am concerned. This is not pantheism nor some vague mystical longing, but part of Coleridge's dynamic organic sense of wholeness, of the relation of man to the natural world, of the necessity of physical and intellectual reconciliations in one system.

These analogical, contrapuntal, allegorical similitudes may be and are quickly sensed as such by the reader, but they also have, because of the 'fusing' power of imagination, something else to convey. The inner and outer aspects of the drama take place in one world, in the awareness of one character or action, and the two aspects modify each other because of their co-presence. The solitariness of the Mariner in uninhabited seas, polar or tropical, is one thing; the solitariness of Christabel in the claustrophobic wood another, and neither to them nor to the reader could they have been quite the same in a desert, or a moor, or in the mountains. One's impressions of the vastness of the oceans, and the mysteriousness of the park-like wood beside the castle, or the *Dejection* storm over Helvellyn, are different because of the inner states of the solitary figures enduring them on their senses.

Not only this, but the laws governing the inner and outer worlds, the poems seem to say, are related to each other, and show a similar inevitability and power. The poetic fusion takes place at various levels, or rather, the reader's awareness is of various levels of it. These split-level facts come out of Coleridge's own myriad-mindedness, and multilateral post-Kantian consciousness, his own growing 'complexification', to use Teilhard de Chardin's word; this 'complexification' becomes more and more evident as the notebooks accumulate.

At one desperate juncture in 1808, he says to himself in Notebook 13:

O! Heaven! the thousandfold combinations of Images that pass hourly in this divine Vale, while I am dozing and muddling away my Thoughts and Eyes—O let me rouse myself—If I even begin mechanically and only by aid of memory look round and call each thing by a name—describe it, as a trial of skill in words—it may bring back fragments of former Feeling—For we can live only by feeding abroad.

Thinking perhaps of his own development, he writes in Malta in 1805:

. . . at first we are from various causes delighted with *generalities* of Nature which can all be expressed in dignified words / but afterwards becoming more intimately acquainted with Nature in her detail we are delighted with *distinct* vivid ideas, and with vivid ideas most when most distinct / & can most often forgive and sometimes be delighted with even a low image

and he illustrates with Cowper's stream 'inlaying' the level vale with silver; one might illustrate from almost every page of the

notebooks—the oar bent by refraction in the water, the eye of a lizard warily on him in his walk (in a sort of love-hate relationship), or—a self-pitying image—the poor sheep with rubbed shins on board the storm-battered ship bound for Malta; or (an image for petty critics) the self-shadows that midges cast before themselves under his night lamp as they run across the printed page; or (an image on his departure for Malta) ‘a Mother dying of a contagious Disease unable to give or receive the last Embrace to her Orphan Child’—and so on, *ad infinitum*.

In looking at his ‘vivid ideas’, earth, air, fire and water, the elements of the Hymns, provide some focal points, though any attempt to separate or categorize them is of course certain to be defeated; they are seen in minute, but also in vast forms, as here, where the ocean, waters, currents of air, mountains of earth, pyramids of fire, blood, ice, the eddy of activity, the tombstone, are all required to describe ‘our mortal existence’.

Our mortal existence a stoppage in the blood of Life [he writes in 1807], a brief eddy in the overflowing Ocean of pure activity, from wind or concourse of currents—who beholds Pyramids, yea, Alps and Andes, giant Pyramids the work of Fire, raising monuments like a generous Victor, o’er its own conquest, tombstones of a world destroyed—yet, these too float adown the Sea of Time, & melt away, Mountains of floating Ice / —

But Coleridge *can* come to earth.

His early ardent interest in chemistry, from the days of Davy’s experiments with nitrous oxide and Poole’s tanning, is common knowledge. What is less well known is that he could scarcely rid himself of his lecture course on the history of philosophy in March 1819 fast enough, not only because he longed to slough off an incubus, but because he longed to plunge into chemistry and biochemistry. The notebooks are full of discussions of suitable terms for attempts to assist Davy, Hatchett, and the others, in finding a nomenclature for newly discovered bases when the fixed alkalis were being decomposed: Notebook 28 begins with a list of suggested symbols for silica, lime, magnesium, oxygen, nitrogen, &c. He was (intellectually) in the thick of the phlogiston–anti-phlogiston controversy; determined to understand it and argue it, he read avidly in the *Transactions of the Royal Society*, in Nicholson’s *Journal of the Arts and Sciences*, in Brandes’s *Manual of Chemistry*, in geological, astronomical works, and, above all, in works in which physiology, chemistry, and biological materials were being brought to bear

on the contemporary controversy about the theory of life. But he makes his own physical observations, too:

Of matter we may often say an unorganized mass; but I doubt whether there exists a mass of unorganized matter.

Fluid is not opposite to solid but to rigid—Solid is opposite to Hollow.

He is interested in the physics and chemistry of the earth—and all that belongs to it. He makes lists of the names of rocks, and minerals, notes minutiae of flora and fauna—the saliva of frogs, for instance, of what is it composed? and the saliva of the desert ostrich? It would be of value, he thinks, to trace the first appearance of saliva, its antecedents in the vegetable kingdom, e.g. lettuce, opium, and to look at the increase of saliva in many animals (including women and children) when they are hungry, or angry.

Looking at a seventeenth-century book of emblems he writes:

In the 17th Emblem. . . . I found an admirable illustration of my theory of obscure Hieroglyphics of human or animal Life being the foundation of the *pathos* of natural scenery, in Rocks, Woods, Waters. . . .

Or again, when he is watching the brightest moon he has ever seen:

. . . I have found occasion to meditate on the nature of the sense of magnitude; its absolute dependence on the idea of Substance; . . . the dependence of the idea of substance on double-touch / & thence to evolve all our feelings & ideas of magnitude . . . from a scale of our own bodies—so why if *form* constituted the sense, i.e., if it were pure vision as a perceptive sense abstracted from *feeling* in the organ of vision, why do I seek for mountains when in the flattest countries the Clouds present so many so much more romantic and spacious forms, and the coal-fires so many so much more varied and lovely forms? And whence arises the pleasure from musing on the latter / do I not more or less consciously fancy myself a Lilliputian, to whom these would be mountains—& so by this factitious scale make them mountains, my pleasure being consequently playful, a voluntary poem in hieroglyphics or picture-writing—‘*phantoms* of Sublimity’ [he quotes himself] which I continue to know to be *phantoms*?

Air also is regarded both in highly personal and in cosmic terms; the infant’s breath, the chimney smoke, mountain winds, laboratory gases, the stifled breath of the asthmatic which Coleridge knew too well from his own case. The latter he applied in one instance to the staccato effect of over-punctuation, and

this in turn, like the late Dr. Percy Simpson, to Shakespeare's instructions to his actors. A very late entry in Notebook 47 (c. 1833) makes one realize again how much a unity in diversity Coleridge himself is, and how the past is carried forward into new contexts, as we move from *Christabel* to his latest theological thoughts in the last year of his life. He is regretting the intellectual stillness and stagnation in the religious life of his time: 'My reflections', he says, 'cannot even stir a Leaf on the Tree of Christian Faith.'

Water, like fire, with which it often appears together, produces the vastest images and some of the most minute and subtle, from the line, a mere fragment, quite irresistible, to my ear, 'Thicker than rain drops on November thorn', and the lovely phrase, 'the dark water-dusk of lakes' to the striking images having to do with 'the whole world of Waters' on the one hand, and the enclosed uterine world on the other.

Take an entry where he is discussing the Active and the Passive principles in abstract terms:

Time, Space, Duration, Action, Active, Passion, Passive, Activeness, Passiveness, Reaction, Causation, Affinity—here assemble all the Mysteries—known, all is known—unknown, say rather, merely known, all is unintelligible / and yet Locke & the stupid adorers of that *Fetisch* Earth-clod, take all these for granted—. . .

Rest = infinite Motion—either infinitely great or infinitely small.

Rest, Motion!—O ye strange Locks of intricate Simplicity, who shall find the Key? He shall throw wide open the Portals of the Palace of Sensuous or Symbolical Truth; and the Holy of Holies will he find in the Adyta. Rest = Enjoyment, and Death! Motion = Enjoyment and Life! O the depths of the Proverb, Extremes meet!

The Break of the Morning—& from Inaction a nation starts up into Motion & wide fellow-consciousness!—The Trumpet of the Archangel, and a World with all its Troops & Companies of Generations starts up into an hundredfold Expansion, Power multiplied into itself, cubically, by the number of all its possible Acts—all the Potential springing into Power!—Conceive a Bliss from Self-conscience, combining with Bliss from increase of Action, the first dreaming, the latter dead-asleep, in a grain of Gunpowder—conceive a huge Magazine of Gunpowder, & a Flash of Lightning awakes the Whole at once!—What an image of the Resurrection, grand from its very Inadequacy. Yet again, conceive the living moving Ocean—its bed sinks away from under, and the whole World of Waters falls in at once on a thousand times vaster Mass of Intensest Fire—& the whole prior Orbit of the Planet's successive Revolutions *is possessed by it at once* (Potentia fit Actus) amid the Thunder of Rapture.—

Another remarkable entry, analysing the sensations of falling asleep and relating them to the pre-natal world of waters, illustrates the inward as this last the outward movement of mind; but again the riches of the material defeat quotation. A startling fact about Coleridge's sensations connected perhaps especially with water, at any rate very noticeable and original here, is his ability to tap and articulate what lies below the level of the ordinary consciousness. (Is it this gift—or this burden—that makes *The Ancient Mariner* the universal poem it is?)

Fire appears in all the traditional contexts, from the comfort of the hearth to hell fires, the sacred fire of the true poet and the fire of the common life. It appears, too, in more surprising juxtapositions and delicate observations like those on candle-flame, for instance.

The beautiful amber edges of the flame, including the yellow-white flame. 2. The unsteadiness of the outer flame; but which is most often the *head* of an Halbert . . . But thirdly, the regular flame, amber-edged too, within the flame; and remaining of the same halbert form, horizontal circles decreasing to the keenest point, save when this inner Soul forced the outer to combine with it for a moment, & the whole flame became for a second of a second, one / and of the form of the inner flame.

There are also amusing applications of fire imagery: 'spitting flame, like a wet candle—a passionate woman'; or,

What an image for the many forked spitefully-against-many-meaner-enemies-moving Tongue of a Dragon is not the first flame of a stick fire kindled in the excess of wind—as against the Door of this Casina / August 20th / Etna /

And some dark preoccupations, in quite late entries:

the Craving . . . the black flame-less Fire of the imperishable will . . . ;

Love and Lust are in their essences as contrary as God and Hades, as the self-communicative Fullness and the Self-seeking Emptiness, as the *eliciting* light and the dark consuming Fire.

As well as the fire that is black, there is the 'frost that performs the effect of fire'.

Asra shines and is cold as the tropic Firefly—I dark and uncomely would better resemble the Cricket in hot ashes—my Soul at least might be considered as a Cricket radiating the heat which gradually cinerizing the Heart produced the embers and ashes, from among which it chirps, out of its hiding place.

He is fascinated by the boiling geysers of Iceland, and in the last year of his life makes, in the privacy of a notebook, an horrific analogy from them:

The Scalds so called from their exposure thro' poetic enthusiasm to the Spray of the Geysers / A cold-blooded Woman's angry passions— Iceland Geysers. Cold, Sir! yea, if Love or warm affections be meant, cold indeed—. . . Yea a very Iceland! but like Iceland with its Hecla, its periodical Rivers of Fire, and its daily Geysers—O had you been within the scalding spray of one of them—then you would have learnt, that Extremes Meet—Frost and Fire, Solid Flint Rocks vaulting and capering in boiling Fluid / O had you witnessed one of her Geysers, unscalded & without a Broken Head—.

The metaphor was out of his reading, but it had been felt on the skin: it was specifically applied to poor Mrs. Coleridge.

Important remark just suggests itself—13 Novr 1809—That it is by a negation and voluntary Act of *no*-thinking that we think of earth, air, water &c as dead—It is necessary for our limited powers of Consciousness that we should be brought to this negative state, & that it should pass into Custom—but likewise necessary that at times we should awake & step forward—& this is effected by Poetry & Religion / —. The Extenders of Consciousness—Sorrow, Sickness, Poetry, Religion—. —The truth is, we stop in the sense of Life just when we are not *forced* to go on—and then adopt a permission of our feelings for a precept of our Reason—.

No one can say that Coleridge ever 'stop[ped] in the sense of Life', as he says. His positive excitements are almost impossible to convey and they persist into the last weeks of his life. It is roughly true to say that the early notebook entries show chaos, and a search in books for natural images, then a quickening of direct response to the physical world—the Quantocks, the Harz, the Lakes, the Mediterranean—and a growing self-identification with natural phenomena and the consciousness of the in-and-out sea-like movement of the feelings and thoughts in relation to them; then comes application in literary and social criticism, as in *The Friend*, and lastly, the application to theological problems and conceptualized discussions of the self and the human race, in philosophical and theological terms, as in *Aids to Reflection* and *Church and State*. In general the process becomes de-personalized, except for its subsumptions, with consequences less or more valuable depending on where the reader's interest in Coleridge lies. But it can never be over-emphasized, that all these facets of the interpenetration of man and nature are in Coleridge's line of country at all times.

I should not say that the natural world held for Coleridge, as it did for Wordsworth, a special revelation. He argues against Wordsworth at this point, as for instance when he denies in the *Biographia Literaria* the innate superiority of rural to city life. The influence of unspoilt country lies partly in what one brings to it of discrimination and knowledge, as he says in Chapter 17: 'Facts are valuable to a wise man chiefly as they lead to the discovery of the indwelling law which is the true being of things, the sole solution of their modes of existence and in the knowledge of which consists our dignity and power.'

But even Coleridge on the elements must come to an end somewhere, although speaking of them I share the feelings of Mr. Shandy, for whom sometimes, you will recall, 'The pleasure of the harangue was as ten, the pain of the misfortune but as five.' At the risk of being personal, and very rash, I should like to put a sharper point on this man-nature interpenetration.

In the summer months I am regularly in one or other of two ideal places for working on the Coleridge notebooks, i.e. the British Museum, or a certain island seventeen miles from nowhere on Georgian Bay. Georgian Bay is the great arm of Lake Huron, of which almost 500 miles of the eastern and northern shore is formed by the pre-Cambrian shield—the same rock that stretches across Quebec and the St. Lawrence watershed, one of the oldest exposed parts of the earth's surface, making the Thousand Islands and the dramatic northern shore of Lake Superior. Where this pre-Cambrian granite meets Georgian Bay it has 'splintered', to use Coleridge's word, into 54,000 islands of awesome and delicate beauty. Birch and pine and maple, cedar, ironwood, and sweet gale grow out of the clefts, not to mention iris, violets, pale blue lobelia, sweet wild roses, yellow loosestrife. Here the gulls, tern, heron (and also wrens, warblers, and humming-birds) have their nests, the loon and the whip-poor-will shatter the great quiet of the nights with their cries, and mink and muskrat, deer and beaver, fox and bear, are in evidence if not often seen. The rocks are washed the year round by water of the most limpid purity, in summer under scorching sun, in winter in the form of snow and ice.

To my island there is no road, no regular postman, no newspaper, no electricity, no telephone. It is not even Year One country; it is country in which the seething turmoil of chaos is still visible in the volcanic whorls of pink feldspar, black basalt, and quartz-granite rock, glacially sculptured aeons ago into forms that a Barbara Hepworth might covet. All this is set in

a tree-and-waterscape remarkable, unique perhaps, for a sense of vast fresh-water space. Yet this vast space-and-timelessness is reconciled to human frailty by being studded with moments, in the islands themselves, of shelter and intimacy. Westward one looks out over the rocks, *a diminuendo*, until the reefs disappear and one is faced with the shoreless fresh-water ocean of Lake Huron itself, yet, inshore, under one's canoe, will be the soft white water-lily and the needle-fine blue dragonfly; or at one's feet, the tiny fragile sweet-scented twin-flower or the waxy pipsissewa.

The long and short of it is that Coleridge's is a spirit more than congenial to these free, spacious, yet intimate elements, and rightly or wrongly I have always felt them a help in sensing his processes. (Hazlitt, for example, an urban character, a bundle of tense irreconcilables, is not so happy a subject here.) Extremes do meet here: some of the oldest, hardest, most complex rock in the world, and water and air of incredible softness and clarity and translucence; rock that has endured from the beginning, the immovable roots of primordial mountains, and sudden wind and weather changes of infinite variability; a sense of the volcano and the iceberg, of unimaginable geological age and of specks of time, of permanence and change. In meditating on these things, or sensing them, one finds oneself thinking naturally into Coleridge's similar juxtapositions in poetry. His words in the *Biographia* drift into the mind:

the balance of reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities; of sameness with difference, of the general with the concrete, the idea with the image, the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects, a more than usual state of emotion with more than unusual order; . . . and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and artificial, still subordinates art to nature.

One's mental canoe slips easily through the gleaming channels and islands of Georgian Bay to the rock-studded pages of the *Biographia Literaria* where these phrases are applied not to a landscape but to 'the poet described in ideal perfection'. That work has been castigated as fragmentary, and the paragraph I have just read has been dismissed as empty rhetoric; somehow it stands the test of these elements. For this, in the true sense of that sorely abused word, is an archetypal landscape, one for the painter, the poet, even for an editor. Here are chaos and process made visible, protean forms harmonized. And the interpenetration of man and nature works both ways in the mind.

My point will be clear and is not new, in any case: that Coleridge's thoughts about life and poetry and society and himself come not out of theory but out of elemental experience, that they gain their power over us, as the elements do and did over him, from direct, specific, rational, observation of brute fact, and at the same time from a *feeling* (I claim no more and no less), now dimly, now vividly apprehended, of 'a spirit and tone of unity that blends, and as it were *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power' to which he gave the name 'imagination'.

Man and nature in him do thus seem to interpenetrate and the pages of the *Biographia Literaria* are written large on Georgian Bay—the book of Nature and the book of Gale and Fenner need not be dissociated. If I associate in sensibility Coleridge's literary life and opinions and the impact of a landscape, he has provided the precedent. In *Anima Poetae* was printed a long and wonderful entry in which there is passing reference to 'the mass of mankind' who 'find the reading of *Paradise Lost* a task' (rather than a pleasure). But *Anima Poetae* does not give the ferocious footnote: 'To attack Johnson with all due severity on this phrase —["a task"] Yes! and the Bible too / & all good works, & the Fields, & Rivers, & Mountains / they—& Dr. J. among the rest —die of Ennui in them—'¹ He goes on to say he will perhaps write—'on the virtues connected with the Love of Nature, & vice versa.'

Fields, Rivers, Mountains, the *Bible*, *Paradise Lost*, are for Coleridge all books to be read, all for pleasure, but not unconnected with virtue—the virtue of imagination? of disinterestedness? of the extension beyond self? of the union of thought and feeling? In other words, what is this but a bid for the renewed association of sensibility? In an entry of about a year later he objects to those who

destroy the Unity of H[uman] N[ature] and make the Association without *will* or *reason*, fantasms and fantastic feelings, the concupiscent, vindictive, and *narcissine* part of our nature one separate, dividuous being, and the pure will and ever benevolent *Reason* they make another Thing, & call it Grace, or the Holy Spirit, or God / Now this appears imprudent, as furnishing excuses for Despair and spiritual Sloth, and instead of that best prayer of putting our shoulders to the wheel with

¹ Coleridge was often unfair to Johnson, as I have recognized in my note on this entry in *The Notebooks of S. T. Coleridge*, vol. i, 2026 n. The point here, however, is not his negative criticism of Johnson, but his positive views on the relation between literature and life.

upturned eyes, & heart, so that the co-operating muscles themselves *pray*, we stand idle & gossip to Hercules with our Tongues /

[There is a footnote explaining *narcissine*]

I mean, not the 'me becoming great and good by spreading thro's and combining with all things', but 'all becoming me and to me by the phantom-feeling of their being concentrated *in me* & only valuable as associated in the symbolical sense . . . with our own Symbol—to men in general, our visual Form'.

The entry, a long one, goes on to associate sexual pleasure with nature (the deep quiet fountain with unwrinkled surface, the cone of sand and the spring image turn up again), to refer again to Milton, retrospectively wishing that association of such pleasures and such virtues had been possible for him. I am all the while naturally linking all this with Mr. Eliot's famous phrase. The age of dissociation, it has often been said, must come to an end. Did it not begin to come to an end—if indeed it ever existed—with Coleridge?

Sometimes one feels that perhaps it is the age of criticism that should come to an end, so far at least as criticism has become autotelic, and worse, tyrannical. Are the difficulties our poetry is enduring not the difficulties of our life itself, and is the pleasure from both not the pleasure from a sense of difficulties overcome, as Coleridge said? Of course criticism persists and must persist, if we are to *know* our difficulties, as both Socrates and Coleridge enjoined. And one of our acute problems, whether we regard as primary the vaster, outer world of nature or the deeper more complex inner world of man, is to understand the interpenetration of the two. Coleridge provides no absolute answer, but he has sharpened an essential tool, the Imagination, and he has made it double-edged. Much of his intellectual strength and integrity lies in the fact that while resisting, passionately, the view of man as mere phenomenon, he was not afraid of the phenomenal experience, nor of inquiring into it to an extent perhaps unique in England in his time. We must uncover, discover, he says, in ourselves and in nature, the chaos we would tame, before we can enunciate its laws and find, or create, the appropriate symbol or exponent in nature, or in the work of art.

When one goes, as soon as the ice is out, to Georgian Bay one finds on the shores a good deal of driftwood cast up by the winter storms. We gather it by the canoe-load for our log fires. I have tried to bring you tonight a few pieces of driftwood from my

beach-combing activities, to light a companionable fire against the rigours of an English winter; perhaps too, in the hope of stroking the prickly fur of dissociated sensibilities in what Coleridge, on another February night about a hundred and thirty years ago, described as 'this dark, frieze-coated, hoarse, teeth-chattering month'.