

**The Post Office, the Public Lecture and “Dejection: An Ode”:**

**Public Influences on Coleridge’s Poetic Intimacy**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the conversational style and intimate revelations in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry in connection with the style of his letters and lectures. The way Coleridge achieved intimacy in his poetry has long been approached with correspondingly intimate modes of analysis, primarily psychological criticism. However, since the late 1970s, scholarship has turned towards providing public and social contexts for the previously regarded "private" compositions of the English Romantic poets. In this thesis I explore two media institutions that were integral parts of Coleridge's life: the post office and the public lecture. I connect these institutions to Coleridge's construction and projection of intimacy in the *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) version of his poem "Dejection: An Ode." In "Dejection," Coleridge traverses his "unimpassioned grief," regret, and failing creative inspiration in a colloquial, spontaneous style. By analyzing this private, personal poem in light of Coleridge's letter-writing and lecturing, I will show how Coleridge's engagement with public communication connects to the sincerity in his published work.

The post office and the public lecture were undergoing dramatic expansion and transformation during Coleridge's lifetime. In chapter one, part I, I use the history of the post office in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as a framework for the development of Coleridge's writing process. In the second part of chapter one I consider how pre-1840 letter paper might have influenced the content of Coleridge's letters, and possibly the style of his lectures and poems as well. In chapter two I look at how the intellectual atmosphere created by emerging nineteenth-century lecture institutions affected Coleridge's writing mind. Additionally, I show how Coleridge's lifetime of lecturing on religion, politics, and literature contributed to his poetic style. In my third and final chapter I do a close analysis of "Dejection: An Ode" in relation to Coleridge's letters and lectures, exploring the poem's form, modes of address, and language.

Last, I open up my research on Coleridge to address questions for the future of Romantic scholarship regarding public and private modes of communication. What separates the "private" aspects from the "public" aspects of a letter, lecture, or poem? With this question in mind I bring to light the public influences on Coleridge's poetic intimacy.

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### Short Titles

*NCE: Coleridge's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism.* Ed. Nicholas Halmi et al. Norton Critical Editions. New York: W. W. Norton, 2004. Print.

*CL: Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956. Print.

*CW: Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* Ed. Kathleen Coburn, et al. 5 vols. [London] [Princeton]: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1968. Print.

*Lectures: S. T. Coleridge Lectures on Shakespeare, etc.* London, New York: J. M. Dent & sons, Ltd.; E. P. Dutton & co., Inc., 1930. Print.

*SL: Samuel Taylor Coleridge Selected Letters.* Ed. H. J. Jackson. Oxford [Oxfordshire]: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.

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\*All archive material is from the Samuel Taylor Coleridge Collection, Victoria University Library, Toronto, Ontario.



## INTRODUCTION

### A History of “Dejection: An Ode”

In February 1801, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in a letter to Thomas Poole:

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

The sound of the night wind and the image of the lost child would later make their way into a poem Coleridge wrote in April 1802, a poem that eventually became “Dejection: An Ode.”<sup>1</sup> Coleridge establishes the poetic image in Poole’s letter by pairing the spontaneous, elongated sentence-structure of letter-writing with an oratorical mode of address. Likewise, throughout “Dejection: An Ode,” there are strong connections to letter-writing and oral communication. However, the confessional candor of “Dejection,” and Coleridge’s writing in general, has long been approached through the lens of psychological criticism. Eminent Coleridge scholar Norman Fruman dissected the darker parts of Coleridge’s psyche in *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (1971). Stephen Parrish, editor of *Coleridge’s Dejection: The Earliest Manuscripts and the Earliest Printings* (1988), states that “the original poem was [...] as much a psychological self-analysis as a love letter” (17-18). Not until the late twentieth century has Coleridgean scholarship taken a turn towards historicism by situating Coleridge’s work in the societal contexts shaping its composition. Since the late 1970s, scholarship has begun providing public contexts for the previously regarded “private” compositions of the English romantic poets. In *Coleridge’s Secret Ministry* (1979), Kelvin Everest creates a social contextualization of Coleridge’s work based on

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for “Dejection: An Ode” (*Sibylline Leaves*: 1817).

his place in English society and his relationship with politics, the public, his family and his friends. My thesis will bridge the gap between the early and later traditions of scholarship by connecting Coleridge's most private, psychologically dense poem with popular nineteenth-century modes of public communication. Further, I contend that Coleridge's lectures and letters are not only a background story to "Dejection;" rather, they are part of the poem itself.

The history of "Dejection: An Ode" (*Sibylline Leaves*: 1817) is rooted in Coleridge's communication with his closest companions. The earliest version of the poem was a letter to Sara Hutchinson, Coleridge's love interest for many years. When Coleridge wrote to Sara on April 4, 1802, his letter took the form of a verse-letter. Just a few weeks after reaching out to Sara, Coleridge wrote to his friend Thomas Poole that the poem was intended for him. Even though the poem was originally written to, and solely addressed to, Sara Hutchinson on April 4, 1802, Coleridge apologizes for his delay in correspondence by addressing the poem entirely to Poole: "I ought to say for my own sake that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April last I wrote you a letter in verse but I though it dull and doleful and did not send it" (*CL*, II: 801). In a matter of a month the poem had gone from being addressed to a woman to addressing a man; from an ostensible love letter to securing a bond of friendship.

Over the course of the next few months, Coleridge re-addressed the poem five different times to five of his close friends and sent excerpts of the poem out in letters. Coleridge altered the title of the poem as he sent it to each friend, eventually settling on: "A Letter To— / April 4, 1802.—Sunday Evening" (Stillinger 92). Fittingly, the title "A Letter To—" gives the impression that the poem is addressed to whomever is reading it. When Coleridge wanted to publish the poem in the *Morning Post* (only six months after writing the original letter to Sara) he gave it the

title “Dejection: An Ode.” Even though the more personal passages were omitted in the verse-letter’s later published form, many of the lines stayed the same in draft after draft (*CL*, II: 790).

Coleridge also recited the poem for his friends. Two weeks after composing the poem for Sara, he read it to William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy Wordsworth (Fields 7). Although it was unclear which Wordsworth was the object of the deep feelings expressed in the poem, Dorothy was especially affected by it. She wrote in her journal that, after hearing the lines, she was so “affected with them” that “[...] the sunshine, the green fields, and the sky made [me] sadder” (D. Wordsworth 135-6). Dorothy Wordsworth’s reaction to the recitation reinforces the many testaments to the power of Coleridge’s speaking skills. Further, she indicates that “Dejection” was an effective oral performance in addition to a written exchange.

On July 19, 1802 Coleridge revised “A Letter to—” into 138 lines and sent it to his wealthy poet friend William Sotheby. Coleridge put the poem in a “long verse-cramm’d Letter” which was rich with descriptive images of his surroundings (*CL*, II: 813). Sotheby’s version of the poem was a step towards the more polished piece that ended up as “Dejection.” In relation to his poetic (rather than sentimental) revision of the poem, Coleridge aptly addresses his poem for Sotheby to iconic poet William Wordsworth, with “William” and “Poet” filling in for “Sara.” Because Coleridge often acted as critic of Sotheby’s work before publication, his verse-letter exchange with Sotheby was both business and personal expression. Coleridge compares the poem to a “metaphysical Bustard,” poking fun at the emotional weight of the poem by comparing it to an unwieldy bird (*CL*, II: 813). Ten days later, Coleridge sent the poem to another of his close poet friends, Robert Southey. Southey was a prolific editor, writer, and biographer; he became Poet Laureate in 1813. In Southey’s version of the poem Coleridge attributes the melancholy verses to his “private afflictions” and adds new variations to make it

less an emotional effusion and more of a crafted poem (*CL*, II: 828). As Coleridge revised the poem and sent it to more of his friends and fellow poets (and then revised it again), the poem that would eventually become “Dejection: An Ode” started taking the shape of its first published form.

In its transition from private verse-letter to public, published poem, “Dejection” went through significant content and format changes. Most noticeably, the deletion of verses six and seven from Sara Hutchinson’s letter removed the references to specific personal memories. The most intimate content, referring to a nightmare about his beloved in pain, was not only partially deleted and readdressed, but also reordered within the poem (Parrish 18). The “dark distressful dream” (l. 89) becomes an abstract pain in “Dejection” rather than a real, tangible fear. Even though the major changes to the poem had the potential to leave readers feeling left out for lack of context, I argue that the public rendering of “Dejection” still creates an *effect* of intimacy. “Dejection” was an intimate poem which Coleridge then revised for multiple people. In each revision he crafted the poem to make it more accessible for public viewing. Coleridge’s experience with multiple audiences in his letter-writing allowed him to adapt his poem in such a way that he could establish a relationship with all readers—friends and strangers alike.

“Dejection” was first published on October 4, 1802 in the *Morning Post* under the heading “original poetry” (Parrish 45). It was titled “Dejection. / An Ode, written April 4, 1802.” The original direct address to Sara Hutchinson is veiled in the *Morning Post* with an address to a male figure beginning on line 25 with “O Edmund!” This version of “Dejection” was much shorter than all of the previous ones and marked the first instance of Coleridge calling the poem an ode. The publication coincided with Wordsworth’s and Mary Hutchinson’s (Sara’s sister)

wedding day (*CL*, II: 790). The first publication of “Dejection” was Coleridge’s wedding gift to his friends.

On August 13, 1803, Coleridge sent out a much refined partial text of “Dejection” to enthusiastic art patrons Sir George and Lady Beaumont. The address in the poem is to “William,” an unmistakable reference to Wordsworth. In his letter to the Beaumonts, Coleridge preceded his poem with a copy of Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence” (*CL*, II: 966). Since Coleridge had been influenced by Wordsworth’s poem and vice versa, Coleridge’s presentation to the Beaumonts shows a relationship between the two poems. In its final transformation, the poem “Dejection: An Ode” is seen by critics as a response to the questions posed in the fourth stanza of Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode”: “Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” (ll. 57-58). In turn, Wordsworth’s draft of “Resolution and Independence,” written in early May 1802 and initially titled “The Leech-gatherer,” was a response to “Dejection” (*NCE* 155). Coleridge had sent a copy of his poem “The Day-Dream” (an extension of the sentiments in “Dejection”) in a letter to Wordsworth while he continued to work on “Dejection” (Parrish 14). Not only does the title, “Resolution and Independence,” serve as a pithy comeback to “Dejection,” but also, Wordsworth’s steadfast leech-gatherer is the counterpart of Coleridge’s overwhelming “viper thoughts” (l. 94). From start to finish, “Dejection” was shaped by personal dialogues.

“Dejection” was finally published in its full and most well-known form in *Sibylline Leaves*, in 1817. This version addresses an anonymous female with the mysterious appellation “Lady.” What was once a personalized outburst to “O Sara!” and “O William!” and “O Edmund!” turned into an apostrophic cry to the faceless woman: “O Lady!” Yet even though the later publication watered down the personal elements from earlier versions, the final version of

“Dejection” retained a verse from “A Letter to—” that Coleridge quoted, as critic Stephen Parrish put it, “more often than any others to his friends” (47):

For not to think of what I needs must feel,  
But to be still & patient, all I can;  
And haply by abstruse research to steal  
From my own nature all the natural Man—  
This was my sole resource, my only plan:  
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,  
And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul (ll. 87-93).

At its core, “Dejection” is a cut-and-paste letter intended for Coleridge’s closest companions. His poem, which was originally suited for a “part” of his life (Sara Hutchinson), eventually “infect[ed] the whole” of his social circle. Though the sentiments were recycled, they sincerely connected with many of Coleridge’s relationships and, eventually, his readership.

The unique epistolary and conversational history of “Dejection: An Ode” serves as a fertile starting point for my analysis of the ways Coleridge’s writing style developed through his letters and lectures. By exploring the history of the British Post Office and the public lecture, I will show how Coleridge’s highly fluid shifts from private to public intimations in his poetry resemble the countless intersections of public and private space in both the post office and public lecture institutions. Throughout each chapter, I will reflect upon the status of intimacy of the addressee in Coleridge’s work through varying relationships he had with his readers and audiences.

“Dejection” is seen by scholars as belonging to the “conversation poems,” a group of eight poems Coleridge wrote between 1795 and 1807, each one detailing a particular life experience. Coleridge’s conversation poems are written in “an intimate, low-key, blank verse style very close to his most personal letters” (Holmes, *Early Visions* 85). Thus “Dejection: An Ode” is only one example of Coleridge’s private space turned public. I believe all of Coleridge’s

conversation poems incorporate the intimate address expected of the letter paired with the frequent asides Coleridge employed in his lectures to maintain interest in his real-time deliveries. I chose to focus my analysis on “Dejection: An Ode” because of my interest in the strange contrast between its form and subject matter. The poem has the structure of a Pindaric ode, a form historically associated with celebrating athletic victories (“Poetic Form: Ode”). Yet, the subject matter is deeply melancholy and personal. Even if Coleridge chose his form to mirror the “False Pindaric” (Drury 182) form of Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode,” it’s uncanny how well his personal content fits into the form of a Pindaric ode. In this thesis I aim to demystify Coleridge’s synthesis of public and private in “Dejection.”

In a biographical analysis of “Dejection,” the content of Coleridge’s poem becomes entirely focused on the private; the poem is then eclipsed by his eccentric, emotional personality. In *Coleridge the Damaged Archangel* (1971), Norman Fruman uses Freudian analysis to explicate “Dejection: An Ode.” In Lines 87 through 93 of the poem, Fruman suggests that Coleridge was “trying to suppress sensual thoughts [...] about Sara Hutchinson” which led him to the “shattering discovery” of his oncoming sexual impotence (423-4). Psychoanalysis opens many pathways to understanding Coleridge’s work. However, for my thesis I have chosen to focus only on the way his writing was shaped by external influences. Although it was tempting to draw on rich personal writing sources such as Coleridge’s notebooks (as John Livingston Lowes did in his groundbreaking work in *The Road to Xanadu*), I want my research to show how Coleridge’s intimate published poetry was not entirely shaped by emotional concerns. Further, I believe the self-contained, psychoanalytic interpretations of Coleridge’s writing are missing the essential conversational component of his art.

My primary texts include “Dejection: An Ode,” in conjunction with Coleridge’s correspondence and his lectures. I will analyze the version of “Dejection” in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), its first publication in a poetic volume. From Coleridge’s correspondence, I will show how his epistolary writing style from the late 1790s correlates to his writing style in “Dejection.” Additionally, I will incorporate information I gathered from archival letters in order to analyze the physical aspects of Coleridge’s writing. For Coleridge’s lectures, I will explore his religious lectures from the 1790s and his literary lectures from 1810 through the 1820s. In addition to his published transcripts, I will also include my analysis of Coleridge’s lecture notes, both published and archival.

My first chapter will note the ways Coleridge’s writing took form due to the way the letter was sent and delivered through the post office at the time. During Coleridge’s lifetime, all letters sent to any region outside of London were paid for by the recipient. This condition influenced the way Coleridge’s recipients reacted to his prolific letter-sending. I will also consider the changes in the post office shortly after Coleridge’s death, primarily Rowland Hill’s invention of the postage stamp in 1837, in order to show how the postal reform affected other letter-writers and poets of Coleridge’s time. (Incidentally, Coleridge might have played a part in inspiring Sir Hill’s reform.) Throughout the chapter I will relate such historical factors in letter delivery, letter form, and postage to Coleridge’s own letters and the letters he received.

In the second subsection of my first chapter, I will explore the influence of letter-writing materials on Coleridge’s writing. I argue that the physical form of the letter possibly had an effect on the content of both Coleridge’s letters, and his lecture notes. I will compare the handwriting, layout, and content in Coleridge’s February 19, 1798 letter to Thomas Poole and his November 10, 1812 lecture notes.



In my second chapter I will look at the institution of the public lecture in Britain from the early to mid-nineteenth century. Coleridge's scope for writing material expanded as the public lecture institutions became interdisciplinary. Even though most lectures covered scientific topics, Coleridge's literary lectures were an early part of the expanded educational trend. At the heart of the chapter, I will address Coleridge's religious and political lectures as they relate to the strong presence of direct address in his poetry. Finally, I will explore the layered construction of Coleridge's later public lectures: a mixture of personal stories and recollections from private conversations intertwined with passionate (although off-topic) thoughts on literature. I contend that Coleridge's poetry was also informed by this overlap of private and public storytelling.

For my third and final chapter, I will conclude with a critical reading of "Dejection: An Ode." I will analyze the modes of address, form, and language in "Dejection" in order to reveal the permeable relationship between Coleridge's letters and lectures and his poetry. I will show how the poem's form was in part shaped by the elongated sentences of his letter-writing; how his modes of address in "Dejection" relate to his colloquial letter-writing and lecturing style; and how the language in the poem can be derived from his familiar correspondence.

It can be said that every writer is affected by the modes of communication in his environment. No one lives in a vacuum devoid of influence from the outside world and interactions with others. One might ask why bother with these contexts mentioned above – the post office and public lecture – when the scholarship already contains studies of more encompassing influential social and historical contexts, such as the French Revolution. I argue there is special relevance to the post office and the public lecture in light of the way these institutions had direct bearings on Coleridge's discursive practice: on rhetoric, lexicon, style, topic, and length. By putting his work in these contexts, we will be able to see how even the

most personal expression at the height of Romantic poetry was shaped by modes of public communication. Some may see this context as reducing the personal to the material forms of its transmission. However, I will demonstrate to readers how these public institutions helped Coleridge achieve his voice as poet of intimate subject matter.

## CHAPTER 1

### The British Post Office and Coleridge's Letter-Writing

#### I

Coleridge lived during a fascinating time in the history of the British Post Office. The British postal service took shape through a series of power struggles between the government and the British citizens. Long distance communication by letter evolved from century to century, especially as the post office changed throughout different political atmospheres, systematic innovations, and technological inventions. The height of Coleridge's letter-writing career fell at a cusp moment between the highly-charged open political letter of the late eighteenth century and Rowland Hill's socially equalizing postal reform of 1840. When Sir Hill created the postal reform, he had the idea that because all people have to communicate, everyone should be able to use the services of the post office. In *The Administration of the Post Office*, he wrote, "Letter-writing is as much a natural propensity, as incontrollable a passion, as love, avarice, or ambition" (103). Sir Hill's declaration was perhaps true for the general population, especially when more people were able to use the services of the post office after the implementation of his Uniform Penny Post. However, it is unlikely that anyone writing letters before 1840 had more of a "natural propensity" for letter writing than Coleridge.

Coleridge wrote at a time when the people were using the letter format as a political and novelistic tool, when the price of the letter was at a historic high, when recipients had to pay for (or refuse) their mail, and when letters were delivered by mail coach directly to the recipient's hand. In this chapter I will show how these social and political circumstances, distribution methods, and economic factors of the nineteenth-century British Post Office greatly influenced Coleridge's writing relationship with his readers and his over-all writing process.

Coleridge died in 1834, six years before Rowland Hill's implementation of the Uniform Penny Post and the adhesive postage stamp. Sir Hill's postal reform made the mail system more accessible to everyone in Great Britain, especially the lower classes. On May 6, 1840, the new postage stamp allowed people to prepay one cent to send a letter anywhere, regardless of distance, as long as it weighed less than a half ounce. Since long distance letters were charged based on mileage before the reform, family members often sent blank letters to indicate that the letter-sender was well. The receiver would refuse to pay for the letter upon seeing who it was from and the postman would walk away none the wiser to the money-saving scheme (Robinson 284).

In the 1858 edition of her *History of the Peace*, Harriet Martineau relates an anecdote involving Coleridge and a pre-postal reform blank letter scheme. In the story, Coleridge passed by a rural cottage when he noticed a woman refusing a letter from the postman because she did not want to pay the charge. Coleridge insisted on paying for the letter, only to learn after the postman left that the letter was a blank sheet of paper. The woman explained it was meant to be a free greeting from her brother, signaling that he was all right. Martineau goes as far as crediting Coleridge's interaction as the main cause of Rowland Hill's interest in creating a postal system where friends and family didn't have to beat the system to communicate (Robinson 284). There are many versions of the story in encyclopedias, some crediting Sir Hill with the blank letter experience. However, it is worth considering that Coleridge might have had as great an effect on the British Post Office as it had on his letter writing. The reciprocity between Coleridge and the post office is indicative of a mutually shaping relationship between communicators and their communication systems.

According to Howard Robinson's comprehensive historical account in *The British Post Office, a History* (1948), the modern British Post Office was influenced by political letter-sending practices which date back to the Roman Empire (3). The ancient version of the post office was controlled by the monarchy in two primary ways. First, the monarchy had control of mail access. The ancient version of the post office was not open to the public, but was instead limited to royalty. Second, the monarchy extended their royal influence through delivered written messages. In the sixteenth century, Henry VIII ordered that England adopt a system for conveying written messages, since he felt motivated to communicate as effectively as the Continental rulers (Robinson 5). Other English rulers, such as Queen Elizabeth and the Stuarts did not allow the exchange of private letters for fear of "treasonable plots" (Robinson 7). This tradition of monarchical control over the mail continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. The post office was an important tool for exerting power because "it allowed direct personal influence from the monarch, the embodiment of the state, to be extended over great distance and time in the form of official communication" (Joyce 59). The tradition of the British Post Office primarily entailed the monarchy's communications for itself in order to maintain reign over the country. Any letters from the general public that were written before the mid-seventeenth century were delivered slowly and at the carrier's and letter-writer's own risk. Not until 1660, under Charles II, were social letter-sending conditions developed. Postal laws were established where private citizens were able to send letters through the government-regulated post office (Robinson 48).

With respect to England's history of monarchical intervention in the private letters of citizens, Coleridge and his fellow Romantic poets lived during an exciting period of letter re-invention. From 1789 to 1799, England was affected by the far-reaching politics of the French

Revolution. The letter was being re-appropriated by English radicals as public political statements against an overbearing government with a history of over three hundred years of postal service oppression. In order to promote their political ideas, radicals wrote pamphlets titled “An Open letter to \_\_\_” and filled in the address with figures such as George III and Noble Lords (Favret 7). Instead of mailing their “open letters,” the left-wing activists sold the pamphlets to the public. The activists saw their letters as “a symbol of representative government” (Favret 9) because they gave individuals the chance to make their political opinions known, no matter how taboo the topic.

Moreover, “open letters” can be seen as a response to the early eighteenth-century government practice of opening private letters in order to find out information that would be valuable to them. The practice of intercepting and opening citizen letters dates back to Henry VIII and the Tudor’s possessive attitude towards the mail three hundred years earlier. Eighteenth-century letter-writers were highly aware of the frequent invasion of their private correspondences. Satirist Jonathan Swift wrote a letter to a friend with “an enclosed message” meant for a postal spy: “Direct the enclosed and deliver it to the greatest person in your neighborhood” (Robinson 123). Both the declarations in political “open letters” and the direct address to government officials in government opened letters provided rhetorical fodder for Coleridge and other writers. Even though this type of openness was not entirely unique to Coleridge, it played a significant part in the way Coleridge established relationships through frankness. For example, to his patron Thomas Wedgewood Coleridge wrote: “I never had any ambition; & now, I trust, I have almost as little Vanity.— / For 5 months past my mind has been strangely shut up” (*SL* 122). Coleridge knew that his letters would often reach more recipients than just the intended, since his social circle consisted of a tight knit group of talkative writers

who lived in close proximity to each other. With regard to his personal exchanges Coleridge was forthright, and he encouraged his correspondents to be equally open and honest about their feelings and opinions. Metaphorically, it can be said that Coleridge re-appropriated the “open letter” and the “opened letter” for his relationship with his readers.

Though Coleridge had some problematic habits of expressing everything on his mind, his letters were frequently well-received due to his familiar writing style. In the nineteenth century, the conventions of familiar letter-writing grew out of the popular letter-writing manuals of the mid-eighteenth century. The manuals were meant for both instruction and, for some readers, entertainment, by providing everything from “general advice on how to compose oneself in the ‘epistolary style’” to “the finer points of accepted pagination and sealing techniques” (Wingrove, 149). Coleridge was taught by these traditional letter-writing manuals in school. His early letters are rife with letter-writing conventions (*SL* vii; editor’s introduction). Interestingly, these letter-writing conventions included writing characteristics that seem the opposite of conventional, such as *spontaneity*, *informality*, and *intimacy*—traits that were eventually also associated with lyric Romantic poetry. Eighteenth-century writers such as Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson introduced such writing “conventions” as a means of promoting their moralistic worldviews. Defoe promoted spontaneity and informality in letter-writing by encouraging Tradesmen to use a “conversational style, not a courtly or poetic one” when writing letters, because he thought business failures were due to ostentation (Defoe qtd. in Myers 375). For Richardson, intimacy was important in appropriate epistolary form in order to “mend the Heart and improve the Understanding” (Richardson qtd. in Myers 381).

Defoe’s and Richardson’s conventions of spontaneity, informality, and intimacy carried into Coleridge’s letter-writing as well. The subjects in Coleridge’s letters range from radical

politics to poetry, philosophy, and personal matters such as nightmares, marital difficulties, and struggles with his opium dependence. Often several of these topics would appear in one letter.

For example, on October 21, 1801, the day of his twenty-ninth birthday, Coleridge wrote in a letter to Robert Southey:

O Friend! I am sadly shattered. The least agitation brings on bowel complaints, & within the last week *twice* with an ugly symptom—namely—of sickness even to vomiting—& Sara [his wife]—alas! we are not suited to each other (*SL* 97; emphasis in original).

As Coleridge expressed significant parts of himself to his correspondents, the eighteenth-century letter writing conventions became more singular.

With the popularity of letter-writing manuals came the popularity of the epistolary novel in the mid-eighteenth century, leading to a complex overlap of private opinions in public texts. Both Defoe and Richardson infused their cultural commentaries from their respective letter-writing manuals into the pseudo-private space of their epistolary novels. The epistolary writing genre was also complicated by writers who published letters from their own correspondences mixed in with entirely fictional letters. In their daily publication, *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele “published private letters they received, making their private correspondents their public coauthors” (McKeon 80-1). These “public fictions of the private mode” complicate the standard use of the letter form (McKeon 81). Similarly, the complicated, evolving form of the letter “fused the world of epistolary romance [...] with the world of political revolution” (Favret 7). Furthermore, I contend that the letters in epistolary novels are similar to the popular political “open letter” in that both forms read like an overheard, one-sided conversation. The letter form was no longer a place for only private address to a singular addressee. Letter writing was beginning to be seen as a “literary activity” such as in Samuel Richardson’s popular novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and through poetry commonly published in epistolary form (*NCE* 610).



Thus, the letter began to lose its connotations as an exclusive, one-on-one correspondence as writers played with the notion of public and private in hybrid letter-writing forms.

The epistolary novel in the eighteenth century helped to redefine the public and private spheres since it represented an intersection of the two (Cook 12). Epistolary novels contained letters that were at once exclusive, intimate exchanges with the world of the narrative and yet also public interactions with the book's audience. In his well-known epistolary novels, Samuel Richardson aimed to "negotiat[e] the reformation of the public sphere" by using the familiar letter to model what he believed to be the appropriate relationship between impulsive feelings and rigid reason, where one is balanced by the other (Myers 382). Richardson used the letter form as a way for his characters to engage in full disclosure of their personal feelings while simultaneously informing his readers of his own moral beliefs about the trends in public conduct. The influence of the epistolary literary tradition persisted throughout the eighteenth century, including the popularity of English epistolary poetry. Poets such as Alexander Pope used the exchange between fictional correspondents as a poetic structure, and letter-writing conventions to enhance the effect of their verse. Thus, with regard to the pervasiveness of this literary trend just before his lifetime, Coleridge's inclination to make the sentiments in "Dejection: An Ode" semi-public seems less like a strange quirk and more like an act of preliminary publishing.

Besides being a convenient way for Coleridge to circulate his writing, letters also allowed him to get fresh feedback and, because of the long lapse in delivery time, perspective on old writing. The use of mail coach began in 1784 and continued until it was displaced by railway in 1836. Thus the mail coach was the main source of letter transportation for Coleridge's prime letter-sending years as a teenager and as an adult. While carriages in London were the fastest, they still only reached the speed of twelve miles per hour at the very most. For longer distances,

twenty-five miles in one day was a good day's work since "coach-journeys were so dreary and exhausting that travelers were thankful to move by short stages" (Crofts 123). Since the mail moved slower over greater distances, receiving a long-distance letter was a special event. Furthermore, the recipient would be responding to a letter that was written days, weeks, even a month before. For a writer's process, this temporal gap can be very valuable. When Coleridge sent letters raw with nascent emotions he received reciprocal emotive replies after he was well removed from the heat of the moment. He was then able to respond with more perspective on his own writing and the interaction as a whole—a literal way to achieve "emotion recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* 246). For example, in response to Thomas Poole's claim that Coleridge had mentioned Poole's dislike of a scientist he assisted, Coleridge wrote "I talk so much and so variously, that [...] I lay too many Eggs in the hot Sands with Ostrich Carelessness and Ostrich oblivion" (*SL* 124). In what could have been a heated exchange with Poole, Coleridge had time to compose himself and respond with both an apology and a self-deprecating joke. Similarly, with his poetry, Coleridge was able to get feedback on his verses and intellectual ideas through letters to William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. The temporal distance between Coleridge sending his writing and receiving critique kept the exchange of ideas lively, yet levelheaded.

Coleridge and his recipients were also affected by another aspect of early nineteenth-century letter distribution: the hand-to-hand delivery of letters. After the implementation of pre-paid postage in 1840, a person did not have to be present to receive a letter; instead, mail was placed in private letter boxes or mail slots in private household doors. During Coleridge's lifetime, letter recipients had to be physically present in order to get the postman's delivery and the report of how much their letters cost (Robinson 300). By receiving letters directly into their hands,

recipients during Coleridge's lifetime had a different kind of appreciation for their mail than the users of letter boxes in the mid-nineteenth century. After 1840, the desire for the letter box to be filled replaced the unexpected thrill of the postman's knock. As Harriet Martineau wrote, household letter boxes enabled the "anticipat [ion] [of] hearing from brothers and sisters—a line or two almost every day" (Robinson 300). The accumulation of letters in the letter box turned receiving mail into a matter of quantity rather than quality. On the other hand, letters received and paid for in person allowed recipients to value each letter individually. Receiving a letter was an active event involving a knock at the door, an interaction with the postman, and a monetary exchange, as opposed to a passive look in the letter box. Thus, due to the direct hand to hand delivery paired with the slow mail carriage, letters were often a treat to recipients during Coleridge's lifetime, rather than a burden.

In addition to hand-to-hand distribution methods, certain economic factors made letters a treat and a privilege during the early nineteenth century due to the investment on the recipients' end. During Coleridge's lifetime, recipients had to pay for each letter they received. In 1796, for eight cents, a person could receive a letter from a destination over one hundred fifty miles away (Willcocks 156). By 1812, eight cents would buy a letter from only fifty miles away. Thus Coleridge's prime letter-writing years occurred during the most expensive period of British mail rates in all of British history before the 1840 postal reform. Because of this heightened value of the letter, both monetary and sentimental, a letter writer had to be engaging in order to get recipients to pay for many letters over many years. Private letter-writers were using the persuasive tactics and entertainment-driven writing techniques of published letters in epistolary fiction. Essentially, letter writers had an "obligation to write letters that would justify their cost," even when writing to close companions (*NCE* 610). Coleridge engaged his recipients with his

“abrupt changes in topic and tone” connected by an “underlying harmony” (*SL* viii; editor’s introduction). Even beyond entertainment in his letters, Coleridge expressed genuine empathetic concern for his correspondents, thus his letters were treasured and well-preserved.

One influence on Coleridge’s prolific letter-writing may have been the fact that he did not have to pay for postage when he put out his half of the correspondence. There are nearly 1,800 letters published in the six volumes of his *Collected Letters*, spanning nearly fifty years. Considering that the people he corresponded with were at least middle-class, he could be assured that there would be no monetary barrier on the receiving end either. For the general letter-sending population, the steep cost of receiving mail “promoted the exchange of occasional long letters, since the greater cost of frequent short letters made them less welcome to the recipient” (*NCE* 610). Yet, Coleridge had no reservations sending a letter every few days to his close friends, mainly William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Thomas Poole, and his patron Thomas Wedgwood. Without monetary constraints, Coleridge could use letters as a free way to circulate his ideas and as an outlet for disseminating his opinions and strong feelings. Coleridgean scholars often introduce selections of Coleridge’s letters by saying that the form of the letter allowed his writing to shine since it was removed from the psychological burden of strict deadlines and a judgmental audience (*NCE* 610). However, I believe that the letter was also an economically practical way for Coleridge to get his ideas out to his fellow poets and friends, some with publishing power themselves.

Not long after the postal reform and Coleridge’s death, Wordsworth started to feel the overwhelming burden of receiving too much mail. He wrote in a letter to an unknown recipient in 1841:

The multitude of communications which reach me, especially since the reduction of postage to a trifle, is so great that I have neither time nor eyesight to acknowledge the greatest part of them (Wordsworth, *Letters* III: 1384).

Luckily, Coleridge had not been writing letters during a time when people had “neither [the] time nor eyesight” to read, let alone respond to their multitudes of mail. Unlike the missives to which Wordsworth refers, Coleridge’s letter-writing was appreciated and was met with reciprocal enthusiasm. Moreover, if Coleridge had had to pay for postage, financial restrictions would have limited the number of letters he could write. Coleridge lived during a period in the history of the post office that complemented his natural letter-writing ability while also enabling his innate communication style to flourish. Thus, the British Post Office aided in Coleridge’s writing and feedback process.

## II

The post office regulations in the nineteenth century influenced Coleridge’s manner of composition and *mode* of composition—his actual writing paper. A material culture analysis of Coleridge’s writing instruments reveals new components to the study of Coleridge’s work: 1) the oversized letter sheets might have affected not only the physical form, but also the *content* of Coleridge’s letters and 2) Coleridge’s public writing in his letters and lecture notes took on a similar physical form.

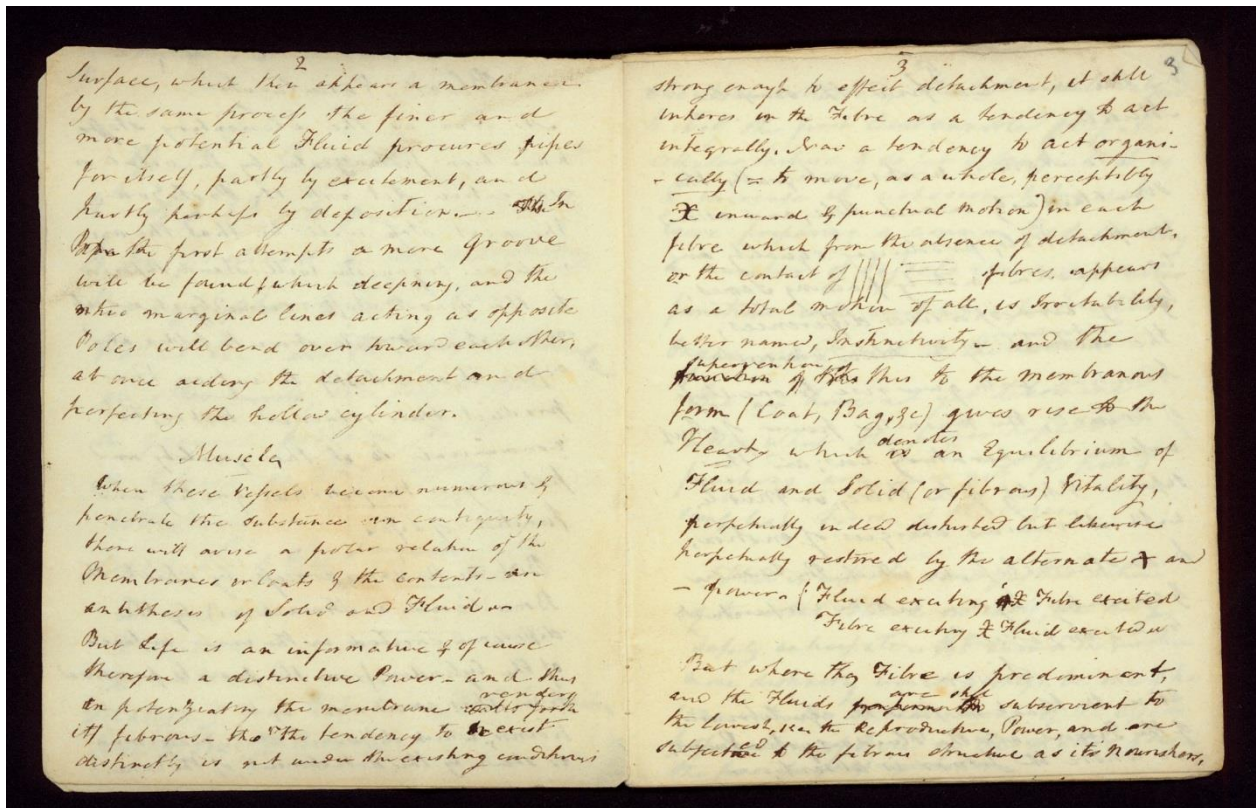
Large letter sheets were a product of the pre-postal reform British Post Office (Figure 1). The use of envelopes only became popular in England when there was no longer a per page charge for letters.

great affection, and I stayed ten weeks at his house, during which time I went occasionally to Judge Bullard's. My Uncle was very proud of me, & used to carry me from Coffee-house to Coffee-house, and thence to Tavern, where I drank, & hatched up disputes, as if I had been a man - & nothing was more common than for a large party to exclaim in my hearing, that I was a prodigy, & of age - so that while I remained at my Uncle's, I was most completely spoiled & pampered, both mind & body. At length the time came, & I donned the blue coat & yellow stockings, & was sent down, Hartford, a town 20 miles from London, where there are about 900 of the younger blue coat boys - At Hartford I was very happy, in the whole; for I had plenty to eat & drink, & pudding & vegetables almost every day. I stayed there six weeks; and then was drafted up to the great school at London, where I arrived in September, 1792 - and was placed in the second ward, then called Saffron-hill ward, & in the under Grammar School. There are twelve wards, or dormitories, of unequal sizes, beside the sick ward, in the great school - & they ~~are~~ contained, all together, 700 boys; of whom I think nearly one third were the sons of Clergymen. There are 5 Schools, a mathematical, a Grammar, a Drawing, a Reading, & a Writing school - all very large Buildings. - When a boy is admitted, if he read very badly, he is either sent to Hartford or to the Reading School. (N.B. Boys are admittable from 7 to 12 years old) - If he learn to read tolerably well before 9, he is drafted into the lower Grammar school - if not, into the writing school, as having <sup>given</sup> proof of unfitness for classical attainment. - If before he is eleven he climbs up to the first form of the lower Grammar school, he is drafted into the head Grammar school - if not, at 11 years old he is sent into the writing school, where he continues till 14 or 15 - and is then either apprenticed, & schooled as clerk, or whatever else his turn of mind, or of fortune shall have provided for him. Two or three times a year the Mathematical Master beats up, 600 recruits for the King's boys, as they are called - and all, & so like the navy, are drafted into the Mathematical & Drawing Schools - where they continue till 16 or 17, & go out as Midshipmen & School Masters in the Navy. - The boys, & so are drafted into the head Grammar school, remain there till 13 - & then if not chosen for the university, go into the writing school. Each dormitory has a Nurse, or Matron - & there is a head matron to superintend all these Nurses. - The boys were, when I was admitted, under reciprocal subordination to each other, according to rank in school - & every ward was governed by four Monitors (appointed by the Steward, who was the supreme Governour out of school - our Temporal Lord)

**Figure 1:** Letter to Thomas Poole. 19 February 1798; pages 2-3 (SMS F3.58)  
(30 x 37 cm; length x width when laid out in full)

Before envelopes, individuals used one large letter sheet and folded it, leaving a blank strip for the address. I contend that the large letter sheet as a physical object affected Coleridge's behavior by allowing him to engage in a spontaneous flow of thoughts without having to flip the page. Furthermore, the larger sheet was more forgiving of tangents and mistakes, which can be observed through Coleridge's letter handwriting. The letters slant towards the right as if written in a rush or a flurry of inspiration. In comparison to the letter, Coleridge's private notebook is much smaller with careful handwriting (Figure 2).





**Figure 2:** Notebook 56. March 1827; verso of leaf 3 (SMS 21)  
 (11.2 cm x 9 cm; 1 x w: single leaf)

Coleridge used the same large paper and folding style intended for letter-writing for his lecture notes. Coleridge's lecture notes for a lecture delivered in November 1812 (Figure 3) follow the same visual format as one of Coleridge's letters from 1798 to Thomas Poole (Figure 4). The lecture notes have a blank spot in the middle of paragraphs in the place where a letter would be addressed and folded.





and by four Markers, who were silver medals, & were  
 appointed by the head Grammar Master, who was  
 our supreme Spiritual Law. The same boys were  
 commonly both Monitors & Markers - We read in classes  
 on Sundays to our Markers, & were catechized by  
 them, & under their sole authority during prayers,  
 &c - all other authority was in the Monitors; but,  
 as I said, the same boys were ordinarily both the  
 one & the other. - Our diet was very scanty -  
~~Every~~ <sup>Every</sup> morning a bit of dry bread & some hard small  
 beer - every evening a larger piece of bread & cheese  
 or butter, whichever we liked - For dinner - on

Mr J. Poole

48

10/101

1005

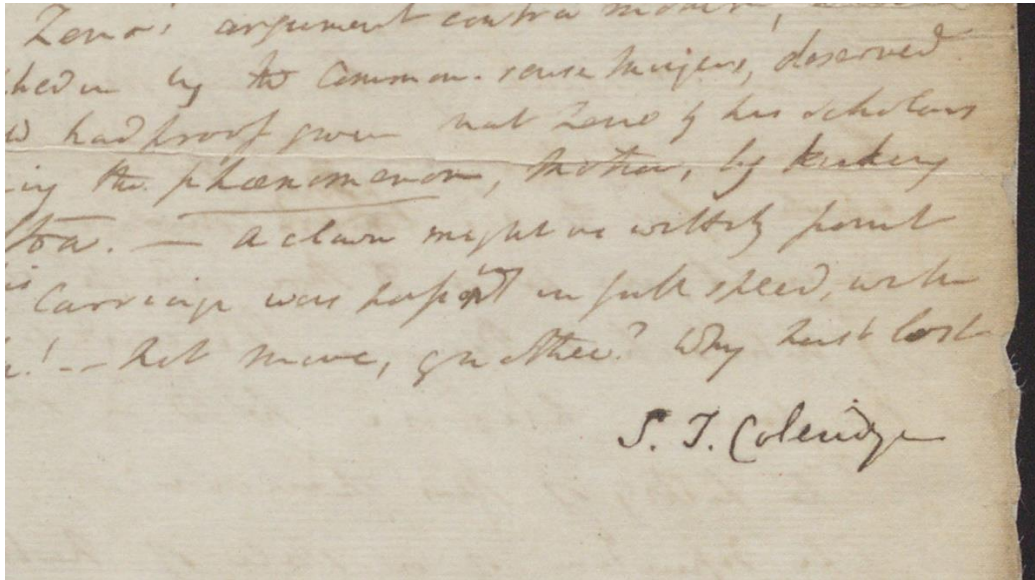
for Pat.  
 Feb 19 1798

Sunday, boiled beef & broth - Monday, Bread &  
 butter, & milk & water - on Tuesday, roast mutton,  
 Wednesday, bread & butter & rice milk, Thursday, boiled  
 beef & broth - Friday, boiled mutton & broth - Saturday,  
 bread & butter, & pease porritch - Our food was portioned  
 & excepting on Wednesdays I never had a belly full -  
 our appetites were damp'd never satisfied - & we had no  
 vegetables. - S. J. Coleridge

Figure 4: Letter to Thomas Poole. 19 February 1798; page 4 (SMS F3.58)

(30 cm x 18.85 cm; l x w)

Furthermore, Coleridge not only constructed his lecture notes on a letter sheet in a letter format, he also signed his own lecture notes after his closing remarks (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** Notes for the second lecture in Surrey. 10 November 1812; page 2;  
Close up detail with signature

Whatever the reasons for the signature, whether for its inclusion in his estate or simply as a way to keep track of the paper, the sight of his name at the end of the page gives the lecture notes a distinctly letter-like appearance.

The visual parallel between Coleridge's letters and lecture notes provides a striking entryway into the similarities between Coleridge's written and oral styles of communication. The spontaneous, intimate, and conversational aspects of Coleridge's letters were also the cornerstones of his lectures. In the next chapter I will explore how the flourishing institution of the public lecture in the early nineteenth century affected Coleridge and the ways in which Coleridge's lecturing career intertwined with his private life and published writing.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Public Lecture and Coleridge's Lectures

When he was twenty one years old, Coleridge wrote in a letter to a friend, “I *write* to others, but my Pen talks to you” (*SL* 3; emphasis in original). Coleridge is known historically as a “talker,” and perhaps this reputation came from his own representation of himself as much as his interactions with others. By using “talks,” Coleridge calls to mind the free flowing “wanderings of [his] castle building Imagination” and the confiding tone he associated with conversations (*SL* 2-3). Coleridge’s “talking” pen is a pithy metaphor for the overlap in his letter-writing and lecturing style. While the post office and letter-writing shaped Coleridge’s writing process, I contend in this chapter that the highly social, interdisciplinary nature of the public lecture allowed Coleridge to develop his writing *mind*.

Coleridge was best known in his social circle and to the wider scholarly public as a great lecturer and conversationalist. Coleridge’s publisher and fellow poet Joseph Cottle gathered numerous testimonials to Coleridge’s oratory genius in *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey* (1847). Among others, Cottle quotes a Dr. Dibdin, who came from Kensington to hear Coleridge lecture on Shakespeare in London. Dibdin gushes about Coleridge’s “unrestrained indulgence to his speech; and how fraught with acuteness and originality” and the spellbinding effect as “one conversation, more profound or clothed in more forcible language than another, fell from his tongue” (221). Dr. Dibdin’s account illuminates Coleridge’s trademark gifts with conversational language.

In the early nineteenth century, the public lecture was primarily a forum for scientific learning. Yet technical, philosophical, and literary knowledge were also on the rise as popular lecture topics among the increasingly curious, and increasingly wealthy, public. The significant

social and economic change that “was ultimately driven by technical and scientific progress” was “not lost on many of the rising industrialists” (Kurzer 110). The Industrial Revolution gave the newly rich the opportunity to take an interest in science demonstrations and lectures. The Royal Institution, established in 1799, offered memberships to established manufacturers and merchants (Kurzer 110). Subscribers to the Institution were allowed access to the lecture rooms as well as other educational venues such as reference libraries and reading rooms. The London Institution founded in 1805, and later, the Surrey Institution founded in 1808, were similar centers for education of the (paying) public. (Due to the membership fee, the lectures were essentially semi-private despite their formal designation as “public.”) For a price, upper and lower middle-class citizens could take part in the scientific progress and intellectual ideas of the turn of the century.

While the Royal Institution and others provided a variety of educational experiences, the public lecture stood out as not only as a source for knowledge but also as “a social centre” (Inkster 83). Attending a public lecture at one of the Institutions was a popular way to socialize with friends and academic peers. Additionally, public lectures were increasingly becoming entertaining, talk-of-the-town events. In 1801, renowned chemist and inventor Humphry Davy changed the traditional presentation format of the public lecture with his charismatic persona and spectacular live science experiments. Instead of merely “diffusing knowledge” about the application of science to everyday life, he “made the Royal Institution a fashionable attraction on the London scene, almost rivaling for a time the Theatre and Opera” (Kurzer 110). It was Davy, with his good standing as a popular lecturer and a brilliant scientist, who brought Coleridge into the public lecturing scene by recommending him to the wealthy philanthropists and members of the aristocracy who founded the Royal Institution (Kurzer 110, 134). The social bonds among the

great academic minds of nineteenth-century science, art, and literature fostered a cross-disciplinary exchange of information that carried over into the lecture hall.

Coleridge attended his first lecture at the Royal Institution in January 1802 to see Davy (Coburn 81). For the next two decades, he regularly attended lectures given by his friends and peers, in addition to giving his own lectures. Coleridge went to the lectures not only to support his friends, but also for creative inspiration. He claimed that he attended scientific lectures at the Royal Institution to “renew [his] stock of metaphors” (Coleridge qtd. in Holmes, *Early Visions* 312). In addition to providing poetic fodder, some scientific lectures delivered ready-made poetic descriptions. For example, Coleridge’s description of premonitory storm clouds in “Dejection: An Ode” aligns with the content of a lecture on naming clouds given by meteorologist Luke Howard in 1802. Howard described cirro-stratus clouds as having “the appearance of parallel bars,” a pattern which commonly “precedes wind and rain” (Howard qtd. in Hamblyn 181). In his poem, Coleridge echoes Howard’s description in his image of “those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars” (l. 31). Additionally, Howard states that cirro-stratus clouds help form lunar halos, “hence the reason of the prognostic for foul weather, commonly drawn from the appearance of the halo” (Howard qtd. in Hamblyn 182). The opening image in “Dejection” is the moon “rimmed and circled by a silver thread” (l. 12). It appears that Coleridge’s storm in “Dejection” is enhanced by meteorological fact, as well as his reference to the “weather-wise” (l. 1) Bard of *The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence*.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge created another splendid connection between the scientific and the literary by applying what he saw with his untrained scientific eyes to his well-developed imaginative and conversational prose style. In her essay “Coleridge: A Bridge between Science and Poetry,” Kathleen Coburn describes how Coleridge’s talent for describing scientific phenomena led him

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, epigraph

to coin the term *psychosomatic* after watching Humphrey Davy cure a case of paralysis with a placebo (85). The public lecture created a fluid boundary between academic disciplines, enabling scientific terminology to inspire poetic description and an awe-inspired poet to name a scientific discovery.

Coleridge's admiration for Davy's lectures parallels the inspiration a young William Hazlitt drew from Coleridge's religious lectures in 1798. What began as a pre-dawn, ten mile trek through the mud to hear Coleridge preach ended up being one of the defining moments in William Hazlitt's life. Eventually, Hazlitt became a premier lecturer on literature right alongside Coleridge in the early days of the Surrey Institution in 1808. In his essay "On My First Acquaintance with Poets," Hazlitt describes the gift of having Coleridge's presence in the church: "a poet and a philosopher getting up into a Unitarian pulpit to preach the gospel, was a romance in these degenerate days" (2-3). Hazlitt praised Coleridge's speaking style, which "echoed from the bottom of the human heart," as well as the manner in which he "launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind" (3). As Hazlitt so avidly expresses, in the late 1790s, Coleridge was a passionate religious and political speaker with strong idealistic beliefs. Coleridge's early experiences with public speaking allowed him to feel free to express his candid opinions to public audiences, a trait which carried over into his literary, and political, lecturing.

In June 1795 during the height of the abolitionist movement, Coleridge delivered a lecture at the Assembly Coffee House in Bristol strongly opposing the slave trade (*NCE* 287). Likewise, in *A Moral and Political Lecture*, Coleridge reveals his opinion on freedom of speech and equality: "whatever contributes to increase discussion must accelerate the progress of liberty" (*CW*, I: 19). Ironically, the surviving record of *A Moral and Political Lecture* was published solely because Coleridge was accused of treason. Coleridge felt "obliged" to print it;

unfortunately, the “reasons which compelled [him] to publish it forbad [him] to correct it” (*CL*, I: 152). In later years, Coleridge edited subsequent published versions of *A Moral and Political Lecture* to soften his earlier radical opinions. However, even though Coleridge had qualms over the way his published lecture portrayed his past self, Coleridge’s lecturing style was consistently candid and compelling, from the religious and political lectures of the 1790s through the lectures on literature and philosophy of the early nineteenth century.

Though Coleridge gave his first official literary lecture on the “Principles of Poetry” in January 1808, Coleridge’s earlier lectures also incorporated poetry. *A Moral and Political Lecture* makes reference to six poems by four poets Coleridge admired. Coleridge quotes from “To the Right Honourable Francis Earl of Huntington ” and “The Pleasures of Immigration” (first version) by Akenside; “Samson Agonistes” and “Paradise Regained” by Milton; “To the Exiled Patriots” by Robert Southey; and “Verses to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, on his reflections on the Revolution in France” by William Bowles. Each poetic reference reinforces Coleridge’s argument with impassioned, inspiring language and calls the audience to action, such as Coleridge’s conclusion with Bowles’s line: “It is the motive strong the conscience pure / That bids us firmly act or meek endure.” (*CW*, I: 19). By integrating poems into his political lectures, Coleridge created a powerful connection between literature and actionable public messages. Furthermore, Coleridge’s way of overlapping of poems and lectures demonstrates the permeability between the two modes of communication.

While Coleridge used the power of poetry to reinforce his political lectures, his lectures on literature and the arts at the Royal Institution often wandered off the designated topic. Attendees were surprised, and sometimes disappointed, by Coleridge’s digressions, since lecture institutions would publish a prospectus for each lecture series and “a programme of *reading* was

often assumed as coincident with attendance” (Inkster 83; emphasis in original). Henry Crabb Robinson, a diarist noted for his portrayals of important Romantic figures, attended one of Coleridge’s lectures presumably on *Romeo and Juliet* and noted that Coleridge “surpassed himself in the art of talking in a very interesting way without speaking at all on the subject announced” (Robinson qtd. in editor’s intro; *Lectures* viii). Yet, audience members were continually engaged by Coleridge’s speaking manner. This audience engagement was not just a consequence of Coleridge’s personality and lecture content. Coleridge actively assessed his material with his audience in mind before giving a lecture. About his lecture preparation, Coleridge states, “The day of the lecture I devote to the consideration, what of the mass before me is best fitted to answer the purpose of a lecture, that is, to keep the audience awake and interested during the delivery, and to leave a sting behind” (*Lectures* viii-ix). However, Coleridge’s intended “sting” for his audience members often got lost in his divergences. In order to recover audience interest, Coleridge adapted his speech with an apology for his digressions. He interrupted one of his lectures on the *Principles of Poetry* (1808) by conceding:

I feel the heaviness of my subject considered as a public Lecture—the tædium felt by my hearers cannot be greater than my sympathy with it—It is unpleasant to travel over a road while it is making; but I trust that hereafter we shall have a smooth way in consequence (*CW*, V: 30).

Thus Coleridge’s interaction with his lecture audiences relied on both the “sting” of insight and the balm of compassion. By keeping his audience engaged through his “sting and balm” public speaking strategies, Coleridge could improvise on his subject and thus expand his ideas beyond the framework of a restricted lecture topic.



Coleridge's conspicuous lack of lecture notes was consistent with his improvisational lecturing style. Although he spent a long time researching and preparing a lecture, he did not write out more than a page or two of notes. Typically, Coleridge's notes were sketch maps to be filled out in the lecture room just before the lecture (*CW*, V: xl). Coleridge's own words reveal his emphasis on preparation over presentation: "I take far, far more pains than would go to the set composition of a lecture, both by varied reading and by meditation; but for the words, illustrations, etc., I know almost as little as any one of the audience [...] what they will be five minutes before the lecture begins" (*Lectures ix*). Coleridge's lecture composition demonstrates his preference for spontaneity over a perfectly crafted speech. In contrast, Coleridge's poetry was based on highly crafted "spontaneity" through multiple revisions. In both his lecturing and his poetry, Coleridge drew on the same principles of natural speech, though he achieved the effect in two very different ways.

Since Coleridge made very few written notes for his lectures, his lectures have survived mostly through the writing of others. Coleridge's published lectures were put together from notes taken by audience members, reports in newspapers, journals, and private letters and memoranda, supplemented by Coleridge's own manuscript notes (*CW*, V: xl; editor's introduction). The mix of sources that contribute to our twenty-first century knowledge of Coleridge's lectures parallel Coleridge's own compositional style to a certain degree. He created his lectures from wide-ranging academic research, personal anecdotes, and conversations with friends and scholars. For instance, in his notes for a lecture on "the present state of the Higher Drama" Coleridge relates an anecdote about his five year old son. He recalls his son's "[strong] expression first of wonder & then of Grief" when he encountered "a very fine Engraving from Rubens, representing a storm at sea, without any Vessel or Boat introduced" (*CW*, V: 134). Coleridge then connects his son's

experience to stage-illusion in the theater. Coleridge's lectures began as a collection of interwoven public and private texts and, considering his integrative lecture style, have always existed as a mediated collection of fragments.

Coleridge also relayed that his lectures were continuations of conversations with his friends. He once supported his "attack on Anna Laetitia Barbauld's poetry by saying that Wordsworth had made the same criticism to him 'at Charles Lamb's two years ago'" (Coleridge qtd. in Russell 138). Just as in his correspondence with his tight knit social circle, Coleridge was able to expand the platform for his exchange of ideas in his lectures. No subject was off limits in a letter, even if it was sensitive for him or for others. For Coleridge, a one-on-one conversation and a letter were only private by definition, but not by practice. Yet the lack of boundaries between his public and private life allowed him to have, essentially, a "continuous conversation" over time throughout different media, a "conversation" which seeped into his published work as well.

It was apparent to those in Coleridge's social circle that Coleridge's public and private styles of speaking often overlapped. Henry Crabb Robinson noted that "his conversation [...] was a sort of lecturing & soliloquizing and his lectures [...] were colloquial" (Robinson qtd. in *CW*, V: 39). Yet, Coleridge's tendency to mix public and private conversational styles resonated with the atmosphere at the public lecture venues. In their essay on the middle-class non-vocational lecture in nineteenth-century England, Michael Stephens and Gordon Roderick state that "lecture and debate provided a public focus for social activity" (192). The attendees at a lecture were in a public setting to enjoy a public talk, yet they also engaged in private interactions within their own social circle. The architecture of lecture rooms also contributed to the private, intimate atmosphere of the public lectures. As Gillian Russell argues in her essay "The Sociability of Romantic Lecturing," the Surrey Institution's "orientation of lecturing away

from the ‘open theatre of the world’ [...] was in effect a turning towards a version of domesticity and the private sphere” (137). Due to this permeable overlap of public and private space in the lecture room, lecturers were free to give their private, candid opinions in front of the public audiences. Coleridge softened his critiques of poets, Russell argues, by reframing his comments as “the subject of a private conversation which he is merely reporting in public” (143). Thus the lecture room served as a “mediating space” (Russell 143), not only between different social circles, but also between private thoughts and public information.

Coleridge died six years before the demise of the public lecture as the social center of academic society in early nineteenth-century England. Despite the popularity of the public lecture, financial problems and social class struggles eventually led to the premature end of several lecture institutions. The Surrey institution closed in March of 1823, just fifteen years after it opened. Due to expenditure debts, the Surrey Institution was forced to increase membership charges by two guineas per proprietor and most members were not willing to pay the steep extra charges (Kurzer 139). Two guineas in 1823 would have had the equivalent economic power of £7,290.00 in 2011 (Officer and Williamson). Moreover, in addition to the financial struggles of the lecture institutions, science changed from a popular lecture topic into an academic discipline of specialized subjects. Science became more of a “means of individual social mobility” rather than a means of education for a public audience (Inkster, 95). The natural expansion of all scientific fields made it so new scientific knowledge was specifically addressed to dedicated specialists rather than laymen audiences. This newfound institutional hierarchy in the 1840s led to a period of “class antagonism” where “no longer could a cultural form be popularized by specific groups operating in unison and across class lines” (Inkster 95). Increasingly, both cultural and educational formations created a greater divide between socio-

economic classes. Though the lecture institutions were founded on membership fees and excluding the lower classes, an additional degree of class discrimination came into effect with the meticulous categorization of academic fields and the separation of public lecture education and private occupational education. With this divide between academic disciplines, education became less of a form of public enrichment and entertainment and more of a discussion between like-minded people. Coleridge lived during the height of public lecture institution popularity. The public lecture's educational environment encouraged his social and academic exchange of ideas, allowing his writing mind to flourish.

While I argue that Coleridge gathered ideas from the unique mix of private and public dialogues in the public lecture halls and from giving his lectures, I also want to note that my argument is not a causal claim, as Coleridge wrote "Dejection: An Ode" and many of his greatest poems before lecture institutions were established in London. Nevertheless, Coleridge drew upon the same resources and techniques for his early poems and later lectures. Additionally, Coleridge gave lectures throughout his life, and his rhetoric for his religious and political speeches could have seeped into his poetry.

The language in Coleridge's conversation poem "Dejection: An Ode" is general enough to be appreciated by public readership, yet it also enabled a private connection between Coleridge and the selected recipients of his verse-letter. Coleridge established an intersection between private relationships and public conversations in both his letters and lectures. "Dejection: An Ode" is another piece of Coleridge's intersecting realm of public and private expression, making it a deeply intimate, public poem. In my final chapter I will examine the modes of address, form, and language of "Dejection: An Ode" in light of Coleridge's letter-writing techniques and lecture-inspired writing mind.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Analysis of “Dejection: An Ode”

Since the publication of “Dejection: An Ode” in *Sibylline Leaves* almost two centuries ago, Romantic criticism in general has ranged from taking the Romantic lyric as a private soliloquy, to treating it as a public performance. According to nineteenth-century English philosopher John Stuart Mill, the sincerity of lyric poetry corresponds with its private composition. In his essay “Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties” (1833), Mill establishes the lyric poem as a sincere personal soliloquy “overheard” by readers (95). He insisted that “when the expression of [the writer’s] emotions, or of his thoughts tinged by his emotions, is tinged also by that purpose, by that desire of making an impression upon another mind, then it ceases to be poetry, and becomes eloquence” (95). For Mill, poetry was ideally about a poet’s personal, inner feelings untouched by concerns about outer relationships. However, twenty-first century scholarship has begun to challenge the claim that sincerity is attained through private feelings in the Romantic lyric. In her book *Professing Sincerity*, Susan Rosenbaum states that “sincerity in the romantic and postromantic lyric in many ways was a *product of commercial culture*: poets who made a living from their writing sold the moral promise that their lyrics were sincere, and engaged this conflict in their work” (4; emphasis is mine). In some ways “sincerity” became an ideal attribute of Romantic poetry only when the authenticity of a poem was questioned due to its presence in the marketplace.

While it is tempting to make claims about the complete reversal of ideas in Romantic scholarship over time, it is also unfair to frame these arguments about Romantic poetry in terms of old and new scholarship. Mill struggles to “discriminate between poetry and eloquence” throughout his essay (95). Rosenbaum writes about the conflict between the “moral practice” and

“good business” of professing sincerity (5). I enter this conversation with my analysis of Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode.” I argue that it was written with others in mind, yet the desire to make an impression did not “commercialize” his sincerity, since it naturally arose from his letter-writing and lecturing. Due to the influence of Coleridge’s communication with others, most evident in the poem’s modes of address, form, and language, I argue that “Dejection: An Ode” is a poem that is both “heard” and sincere.

The personal modes of address in “Dejection: An Ode” can be attributed primarily to the poem’s textual history as a letter. “Dejection” in its earlier form as “A Letter to—” was literally addressed multiple times for several intended addressees. I contend that his intimate relationship with the original addressees was the necessary catalyst for Coleridge’s portrayal of intense emotions. As Coleridge readdressed the letter from Sara Hutchinson to Thomas Poole, Robert Southey, Wordsworth and others, a multi-inspired, muse-like addressee started to take shape.

“Dejection” contains the personal insights that come as a result of writing to friends, not the abstract, nameless ghost of a “Lady.” At each junction where the “Lady” in “Dejection” is addressed, an insight or a strong emotion breaks through the “unimpassioned grief” (l. 22). For example, at the end of verse III, Coleridge seems resolved in his struggle to regain “The passion and the life, whose fountains are within” (l. 46). Yet the address in the first line of verse IV: “O Lady! we receive but what we give” (l. 47) is a stark transition from the heaviness of verse III. This acknowledgement of a relationship, even as a metaphor, is a turning point in the mood of the poem. The rest of verse IV is hopeful, with imagery of a “wedding-garment” (l. 49) and a “light, a glory” (l. 54) issuing from the soul. In a sense, after “giving” his poem to multiple addressees, Coleridge “received” the poetic inspiration he was searching for. In the ode, “Lady” fell easily into the placeholder for an addressee while retaining the intimate message.

Coleridge's direct address in his lecturing coincides with similar attention-getting devices in "Dejection." Just as he would periodically acknowledge the hypothetical concerns of his lecture audiences and then continue on with his meandering lecture, Coleridge periodically addresses the muse of his ode to draw attention to his main points. For example the line "O Lady! we receive but what we give" (l. 47) draws attention to Coleridge's important insight. The previous verse is burdened with heavy language and contains no direct address. Coleridge patterns his darker sentiments with aptly placed addresses to the "Lady," as if she were a live audience. Similarly, Coleridge uses oratorical attention-getting devices such as "Ah! From the soul must issue forth" (l. 53) and "For lo! The New-moon winter bright!" (l. 9) to draw attention to phrases of heightened emotion. The oratorical devices engage the reader in the present moment of the scene and in the image of Coleridge's emotional sincerity.

The engagement created by the poem's oratorical address and interjections is enhanced by the thirty three exclamation points throughout the whole poem. About one fourth of the poem is punctuated by exclamation points, and the rest is long, comma-filled phrases. Significantly, most of the exclamation points are located at the beginning, middle verse, and end of the poem, mirroring the vocal signals of the rising and falling action in a lecture or a conversation. The excitement at the beginning of a lecture captures the audience's attention. When the speaker's volume rises at the height of his argument, the audience pays more attention to the main point. Increased volume at the end of a lecture signals the speaker's closing remarks and the final thoughts. For example, the last five lines of the first verse of "Dejection" contain three exclamation points which build the intensity and "volume" of the message:

And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,  
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!  
 Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed  
 And sent my soul abroad,

Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live! (ll. 15-20)

A similar balance of exclamatory phrases is evident in a transcript of the opening statement of Coleridge's *The Plot Discovered; or an address to the People on Ministerial Treason*:

“The mass of the people have nothing to do with the laws, but to obey them!” Ere yet this foul treason against the majesty of man, ere yet this blasphemy against the goodness of God be registered our statutes, I enter my protest! Ere yet our laws as well as our religion be muffled up in mysteries, as a Christian I protest against this worse than Pagan darkness! (CW I: 285).

In Lines 15 through 20 in “Dejection” and the excerpt from his political lecture, Coleridge uses three exclamations which progress from frustration into a call for action. These parallels between Coleridge's oratorical modes of address and vocal inflections in his lectures and the style of “Dejection” demonstrate an overarching persuasive and conversational style throughout Coleridge's work.

The conversational style established in “Dejection” coincides with its form on the page. The poem consists of eight verses divided into two or three phrases, with each phrase loosely linked by punctuation and conjunctions. The fifty six “and's” throughout the poem practically hold the poem together, giving it a breathless feeling, as if the speaker does not have enough time to get out his thoughts, like the flurry of writing everything down in a letter, or the excitement of giving a lecture and getting off topic. For example, in verse II, a string of celestial, atmospheric images builds in scope and intensity after each “and”:

All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
Have I been gazing on the western sky,  
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:  
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!  
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,  
That give away their motion to the stars (ll. 27-32)



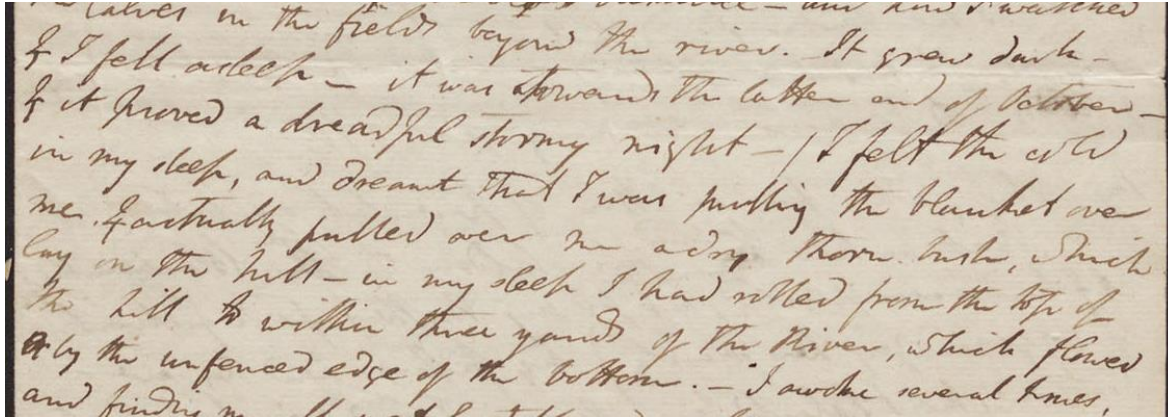
The three consecutive images joined by “And” at the beginning of Lines 29, 30 and 31 are connected, though not directly. The paratactic structure of this phrase implies spontaneity in Coleridge’s free-flowing train of thought. Symbolically, Coleridge’s use of parataxis relates to his encounter with a scene he cannot fully comprehend. The expansiveness and the strange beauty of the natural world is lost on him due to his “blank [...] eye” (l. 30) of mind-numbing grief.

Coleridge’s use of parataxis to imply spontaneity is also prevalent in his letter-writing. In the autobiographical letter he wrote to Thomas Poole on October 16, 1797, Coleridge used a combination of ampersands and the spelled-out “and” to recount a distressing event from his childhood:

[...] It grew dark—  
 & I fell asleep—it was towards the latter end of October—  
 & it proved a dreadful stormy night— / I felt the cold  
 in my sleep, and dreamt that I was pulling the blanket over  
 me, & actually pulled over me a dry thorn bush, which  
 lay on the hill—in my sleep I had rolled from the top of  
 the hill to within three yards of the River, which flowed  
 by the unfenced edge of the bottom (Letter to Thomas Poole. 16 October 1797).

As Coleridge divulges his overnight experience as an angry seven-year-old runaway, his details become more severe. The danger of young Coleridge’s situation builds after each “and,” beginning with being lost and ending in potential mortal peril. The parataxis in Coleridge’s meandering eight-line sentence alludes to his spontaneous train of thought as he remembers that night from his childhood. However, when looking at the physical construction of Coleridge’s letter to Poole, the sentence could appear as artfully constructed then woven together by ampersands and dashes. The ampersands are at the edge of the paper, as if he paused then

added on to his meandering thought.



**Figure 6:** Letter to Thomas Poole. 16 October 1797; excerpt (SMS F3.58)

Coleridge's handwritten copy of "A Letter to—" for the Wordsworths (now known as the Dove Cottage Manuscript) shows each line of the verses extending from the extreme left edge to the extreme right edge of the page. Lines 29 through 31 from "Dejection" match up with Lines 12 through 14 on page two of the Dove Cottage Manuscript (Parrish 78). Although the Dove Cottage Manuscript is a copy of the poem and not the original draft, the physical construction of Coleridge's writing shows a tendency towards a paratactic structure. Whether the structure was spontaneous or deliberate is insignificant compared to its effect. Both sets of paratactic lines connect a description of an imposing surrounding environment to an emotional description and then continue to describe the scene. The ampersands at the beginning of the second and third lines of the letter excerpt and the "and" at the beginning of Line 29 and Line 30 in "Dejection" have the same breathless, spontaneous effect. Spontaneity is often associated with private, comfortable interactions. In Coleridge's letter-writing, spontaneity was occasioned by a conversational style.

The language in "Dejection: An Ode" is more social than poetic. The poem begins as if in the middle of a conversation. The interjection "Well!" (l. 1) is strangely familiar and surprising,

more expected in the climax of an argument than as the first word of an ode. Fittingly, the entire poem starts out as if in conversation with the thirteenth-century “Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence.” As the epigraph suggests, the first verse of “Dejection” is a response to a “deadly storm” foretold by the strange formation of the moon. The ballad became popular in England after its first printing in 1765 in Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (Ferguson et al. 103). By using the language and imagery from “The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,” Coleridge connected with his contemporary readers, especially the Wordsworths and other poetically inclined members of his social circle, through a shared cultural literacy.

While Coleridge’s conversational air in “Dejection: An Ode” grew out of the writing he did in other modes of communication, there is still the issue of its *sincerity*. How can a poem written for publication not be at least partly contrived? Nineteenth-century poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld acknowledged this conflict of publicizing the private lyric. She claimed, as Susan Rosenbaum paraphrases, that “private suffering fed the cause of celebrity in the marketplace; [...] poets exploited and even marketed private emotion” (Rosenbaum 171). Barbauld was a contemporary of Coleridge, and her criticism was directed at him and several other poets. Yet, Barbauld’s critique of poems that “market” private sentiments does not extend to the letter-writing and lecturing atmospheres of the early nineteenth century. Expressing private emotions was an expected component of letter-writing, even though letters were often read by friends and family of the intended recipient. This influential nineteenth-century communication atmosphere suggests Coleridge could authentically share his private emotions in “Dejection” with the public.

By John Stuart Mill’s definition, Coleridge’s poetic style (especially in his conversation poems) is more “eloquence” than “poetry.” Mill defines “eloquence” as “feeling pouring itself forth to other minds, *courting their sympathy, or endeavoring to influence their belief*, or move

them to passion or action” (95; emphasis mine). Coleridge was well-versed in eloquence due to both his letter-writing and lecturing. He “courted [...] sympathy” through his letter-writing by adapting his style to the likes of his recipients. As H. J. Jackson, editor of Coleridge’s *Selected Letters*, points out, when Coleridge “writes to his censorious brother George (a school master) or to James Gooden (a classical scholar), his letters become heavily freighted with Latin quotations and rather creaking classical jokes,” while “the language of his letters to Benjamin Flower, an active Unitarian, seems rather sanctimoniously biblical” (x). Coleridge also “endeavor[ed] to influence belief[s]” as demonstrated by his rousing religious and political lectures. Coleridge began his *Lecture on the Slave-Trade* with the thought-provoking, “Whence arises our Miseries? Whence arises our Vices?” and a provocative answer: “From artificial Wants” (*CW*, I: 235). Coleridge’s “eloquence,” developed through his letters and lectures retained the sincerity of his personal opinions.

Conversely, Coleridge’s methods of adapting his style for his intended audience could also be considered artificially induced lyric “sincerity” rather than as a way of creating *personal* relationships. According to *The New York Times* poetry critic David Orr, “‘the personal’ has to do with [...] how we see ourselves, how we see others, how we imagine others see us, how they actually see us, and the potential embarrassment, joy, and shame that occur at the intersection of these different perspectives” (5). Thus “the personal” is more about a relationship between people rather than an effusion of private information. Taken in light of Orr’s definition, Coleridge establishes two key components of a personal relationship in “Dejection.” First, in verses I through III, he establishes how he sees himself and his frustrating lack of emotion. Then, in verse IV he reaches out to the addressee in the statement, “we receive but what we give” (l. 47), boldly developing his vision of his relationship with others and with himself. Though

Coleridge didn't project how he imagined his readers would see him, "Dejection" served as a topic of discussion among his circle of friends. Just as a conversation is the exchange of ideas between two or more people, Coleridge established personal relationships with his friends through the circulation of his poem.

In her introduction to *Professing Sincerity*, Rosenbaum states that she "aims to inspire readers to [...] think about issues of sincerity with greater complexity, moving past the conventional moralizing opposition between sincerity and theatricality" (11). My analysis of "Dejection" in light of Coleridge's letters and lectures covers more ground in realizing Rosenbaum's aspiration. I contend that Coleridge combined elements of theatricality and sincerity of feeling in relationships through his letter-writing and public lecturing. Coleridge established a relationship with his audiences when he performed his lectures. In his letter-writing he adapted his writing style for various recipients, essentially using a different verbal performance for his different relationships. These modes of communication intertwined throughout Coleridge's poetic compositions, establishing the foundation of Coleridge's style in his conversation poems.

With its conversational elements, "Dejection" is not only personal; it's intimate. It goes beyond individual relationships and establishes a broader relationship akin to the intimacy between a beloved public figure and his supporters. The type of "intimacy in lyric poetry, as in life, is a kind of relationship: It assumes that 'we' understand each other, that 'we' might be able to disclose things to each other of a personal nature" (Orr 11). For Coleridge, this kind of lyric intimacy came from the way he intertwined his private and public communication. It may seem like a contradiction: how can the practice of mixing private thoughts and public communication make a poem more intimate? However, I believe that the more Coleridge encouraged frank

exchanges with his correspondents and shared his opinions and personal stories in his lectures, the better he was able to craft a personal poem for his love interest, his friends and, eventually, for publication. True, the sincere and intimate nature of Coleridge's letters and lectures might not have been entirely pure. Yet through those public modes of communication, Coleridge honed his ability to present ideas for an intimate-feeling relationship with his readers/audience.

## POSTSCRIPT

Coleridge signed almost everything he wrote. He signed all of his letters and even his lecture notes with “S.T. Coleridge.” He signed his hand-copied poems with his initials. In each case the signature at the end of his writing is a symbolic reminder of the relationships he developed through all forms of communication, written and oral, published and unpublished. A handwritten signature is a representation of authenticity. From an official public document to a private letter, the closing signature is a bond between writer and recipient.

A postscript, coming after the signature, is an afterthought; it’s a sub-point or an addendum after the main body of a text. For Coleridge, a postscript could also serve as a second layer of communication. Like an aside during a lecture, Coleridge’s postscript in a letter his friend Anne Evans implies an intimate, almost secretive exchange. In February 1792, Coleridge wrote:

P.S. I add a postscript on purpose to communicate a joke to you. A party of us had been drinking wine together, and three or four freshmen were most deplorably intoxicated. (I have too great a respect for delicacy to say drunk.) As we were returning homewards, two of them fell into the gutter (or kennel). We ran to assist one of them, who very generously stuttered out, as he lay sprawling in the mud: “N-n-n-no—n-n-no! –save my f-fr-fr-friend there; n-never mind me, I can swim.”  
 Won’t you write me a long letter now, Anne? (*CL*, I: 39)

Coleridge’s purposeful postscript exemplifies a fusion of the rhetorical and oratorical devices that permeate his work. His parenthetical expressions are like conversational tangents; his use of stuttering and sound aids the joke’s punch line; and everything builds to a direct address at the end, making the concluding question both playful and poignant.

Like Coleridge, “I add a postscript on purpose” in order to nuance my arguments. In this thesis, I aimed to demonstrate how Coleridge’s letters and lectures affected his poem “Dejection: An Ode.” Yet, the relationships between the elements in Coleridge’s body of work are more like

threads in a finely woven tapestry than the crude mechanics of cause and effect. He used the long sentences of his letters in his poems and he turned his poems into verse-letters. He used conversational devices in his poems and he used poetry to persuade his lecture audiences. Thus, “Dejection: An Ode” was not only *affected* by his letters and lectures; in turn, it is more likely that Coleridge’s poems, letters, and lectures were all part of the same discursive system.

Coleridge’s interconnected writing styles open a channel between the elements of his writing and conventions for public communication. “Spontaneity” was a publicly known letter-writing convention in the eighteenth-century; it also became a common “convention” for Romantic poets expressing their private emotions. It is possible that Coleridge’s experience with writing spontaneous, long sentences in his letters allowed him to use the same paratactic style in his poems. Likewise, the direct address Coleridge used in his lectures to summon the interest of his audience is similar in nature to the apostrophic address in “Dejection.” While Coleridge undoubtedly expressed private subject matter in his poems, the writing techniques he used suggest that his poems were also inspired by public communication. On a grander scale, Coleridge’s poetry can be seen as a product of the institutions which shaped his communication style. This notion pushes Romantic scholarship further away from psychological and biographical analysis and moves it towards even broader, and possibly technological, historical contexts.

Incidentally, Coleridge lived during a time of major growth in British communication. His lifetime coincided with the end of the long eighteenth century (1688-1832), a period categorized by historians as a natural division in British social and political history. According to historian Frank O’Gorman, “one of the most widely remarked themes of the long eighteenth century [...] was the commercial and imperial expansion which contributed so much to the



prosperity of British society” (xiii). The development of the British Post Office from the reign of Charles II to the years just before Rowland Hill’s postal reform no doubt aided in such societal expansion. Furthermore, along with the expansion of communication came the inevitable expansion of information and, consequently, the demise of the localized public lecture as the social center of British academic society.

My research on Coleridge has led me to further questions about Romanticism, public communication, and writing technologies. Were there other public modes of communication that had an effect on Coleridge? What were the effects? How did the changes in the post office affect other Romantic poets? Did the poets ever use the large, pre-postal reform letter paper for composing poetry? Was the poetry they wrote before the reform different from their poetry written after it? And, as the private increasingly became more public through new technologies, is it possible that public exchanges started to acquire the personal qualities of the private? These questions only scratch the surface of the possibilities for future Romantic scholarship.

I close with a parting thought on Coleridge’s “Dejection.” “Dejection: An Ode” is not just an ode. To Coleridge’s friends it was a verse-letter, and in today’s scholarship it is known as a conversation poem. This ambiguity of poetic genre is not new to Romanticism. According to critic Virginia Jackson, “there was not one kind of poem in the romantic period that could be definitively named *the romantic lyric*” due in part to the way “romantic poets were mixing popular genres (ballads and hymns, odes and songs, epistles and elegies) under the sign of the *lyric*” (“Lyric” 831; emphasis in original). Beyond the existing hybrid genres, Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode” opens up the possibility of a “public communication” genre in Romantic poetry.



**Appendix**

Dejection:

An Ode.

*Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,  
 With the old Moon in her arms;  
 And I fear, I fear, my master dear!  
 We shall have a deadly storm.*

Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence.

## I

WELL! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made  
 The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,  
 This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence  
 Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade  
 Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes, 5  
 Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes  
 Upon the strings of this Æolian lute,  
 Which better far were mute.  
 For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!  
 And overspread with phantom light, 10  
 (With swimming phantom light o'erspread  
 But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)  
 I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling  
 The coming-on of rain and squally blast.  
 And oh! that even now the gust were swelling, 15  
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!  
 Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed  
 And sent my soul abroad,  
 Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
 Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live! 20

## II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,  
 A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,  
 Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,  
 In word, or sigh, or tear—

O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood, 25  
 To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,  
 All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
 Have I been gazing on the western sky,  
 And its peculiar tint of yellow green:  
 And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye! 30  
 And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,  
 That give away their motion to the stars;  
 Those stars, that glide behind them or between,  
 Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen;  
 Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew 35  
 In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;  
 I see them all so excellently fair,  
 I see, not feel how beautiful they are!

## III

My genial spirits fail,  
 And what can these avail, 40  
 To lift the smoth'ring weight from off my breast?  
 It were a vain endeavour,  
 Though I should gaze for ever  
 On that green light that lingers in the west:  
 I may not hope from outward forms to win 45  
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

## IV

O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
 And in our life alone does Nature live:  
 Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!  
 And would we aught behold, of higher worth, 50  
 Than that inanimate cold world allow'd  
 To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
 Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,  
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
 Enveloping the Earth— 55  
 And from the soul itself must there be sent  
 A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,  
 Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

## V

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me  
 What this strong music in the soul may be! 60  
 What, and wherein it doth exist,  
 This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,

This beautiful, and beauty-making power.  
 Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given, 65  
 Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,  
 Life, and life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,  
 Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,  
 Which wedding Nature to us gives in dow'r,  
 A new Earth and new Heaven, 70  
 Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—  
 Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—  
 We in ourselves rejoice!  
 And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,  
 All melodies the echoes of that voice, 75  
 All colours a suffusion from that light.

## VI

There was a time when, though my path was rough,  
 This joy within me dallied with distress,  
 And all misfortunes were but as the stuff  
 Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness: 80  
 For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,  
 And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seem'd mine.  
 But now afflictions bow me down to earth:  
 Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;  
 But oh! each visitation 85  
 Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,  
 My shaping spirit of Imagination.  
 For not to think of what I needs must feel,  
 But to be still and patient, all I can;  
 And haply by abstruse research to steal 90  
 From my own nature all the natural Man—  
 This was my sole resource, my only plan:  
 Till that which suits a part infects the whole,  
 And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul.

## VII

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind, 95  
 Reality's dark dream!  
 I turn from you, and listen to the wind,  
 Which long has rav'd unnotic'd. What a scream  
 Of agony by torture lengthen'd out  
 That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without, 100  
 Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,  
 Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,  
 Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,

Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,  
 Mad Lutanist! who in this month of show'rs,  
 Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flow'rs, 105  
 Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,  
 The blossoms, buds, and tim'rous leaves among.  
 Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!  
 Thou mighty Poet, even to Frenzy bold!  
 What tell'st thou now about? 110  
 'Tis of the Rushing of an Host in rout,  
 With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds—  
 At once they groan with pain and shudder with the cold!  
 But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!  
 And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd, 115  
 With groans, and tremulous shudderings—all is over—  
 It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!  
 A tale of less affright,  
 And temper'd with delight,  
 As Otway's self had fram'd the tender lay— 120  
 'Tis of a little child,  
 Upon a lonesome wild,  
 Not far from home, but she hath lost her way:  
 And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,  
 And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear. 125

## VIII

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:  
 Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!  
 Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,  
 And may this storm be but a mountain-birth, 130  
 May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,  
 Silent as though they watch'd the sleeping Earth!  
 With light heart may she rise,  
 Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,  
 Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice:  
 To her may all things live, from Pole to Pole, 135  
 Their life the eddying of her living soul!  
 O simple spirit, guided from above,  
 Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,  
 Thus may'st thou ever, evermore rejoice.

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