Talking Coleridge:
Three Conversation Poems

by

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For my teachers, who are many

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Abstract

The topic for this thesis is the status, nature, genealogy and structure of conversation in Coleridge's writing. While I fold these features into a general rubric of speech and its relationship to writing, it will be my task here to focus that relationship within several historical contexts, through which I will read my primary texts. To delimit a manageable space for myself I have chosen three of Coleridge's more well known blank verse poems: "The Nightingale," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," and "Eolian Harp." My goal is to produce a range of historical and linguistic contexts for these poems, which should restore some original sense of 'conversation' to the poetry while mapping fresh critical readings and histories geared towards some of the present concerns to the study of Romanticism.

My first chapter attempts to place "The Nightingale" within the context of 18th century ballad revivalism. 'Conversation' here takes the form of post-structuralist semiotics, phonemic languages and their critiques of logocentricity. I see the large-scale narrative of ballad revivalism as a social and economic process through which oral poetries become texts, and through which the present confronts and refigures its past. I call this narrative, in its entirety, *Literalization*, a term I adapt from Pascale Casanova. My reading of "The Nightingale" maps out the formal coding of this story. I attempt to read the themes and argument against the form of the poem, a method that I believe points up the poem's project to resist its own poetic production. However, I argue that this deconstructive poetics is precisely the effect of "The Nightingale's" historical situation. As such, I argue that the poem's resistance is a resistance to history more generally, and to the partcular historical moment in which the poem is composed.

My second chapter focuses on the public lecture or monologue as a conversational form. I locate what I call the conversational fetish, the particular oratorical operation which characterizes the format's disavowal of an implied breakdown in communication between orator and auditor through a 'turning awry' from the conversational moment itself, first in a series of lectures delivered by Coleridge in Bristol in 1795, and then reproduce that structure in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." While the lectures focus a literal picture of the 'turning awry,' I argue that "Lime-Tree" performs the same movement rhetorically.

My third and final chapter takes on Coleridge's reputation as a talker. Here I identify the recursive structures that govern that myth, and their operations within Henry Nelson Coleridge's *Table Talk*. I use "The Eolian Harp," as a lens through which to study the recursive structure of language in general, which helps to illuminate some of the editorial procedures and aesthetical claims of the *Table Talk*.

Last, I want to use the space of this abstract to suggest something about the structure and style of the thesis itself. While I believe I have identified and argued a through-line, the process in which I wrote this thesis was highly inductive. Because writing tends to generate thinking, I have had to prune a number of insights which were the germs of arguments and observations that remain in the body of the thesis. In relevant, and tangential cases I have relegated these thoughts to a discursive footnote. However, I would encourage my reader to consider these footnotes as always in conversation with the body of the text.

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<u>Short Titles</u>

CL <u>Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge</u> ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956 –)

UL <u>The Unpublished Letters of S.T. Coleridge</u> ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1933)

CN <u>The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Text</u> ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1957)

CN Notes <u>The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Notes</u> ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1957)

TT S. T. Coleridge <u>Table Talk</u> ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) Citations of this text refer to page numbers.

PW S.T. Coleridge <u>Poetical Works I: Poems (Reading Text)</u> ed. J.C.C. Mays, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001)

PW Variorum S.T. Coleridge <u>Poetical Works II: Poems (Variorum Text)</u> ed. J.C.C. Mays, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001)

Lectures S.T. Coleridge <u>Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion</u> ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Citations of this text refer to page numbers.

<u>Figures</u>

INTRODUCTION

Conversation Pieces

The master topic of this thesis is the style, nature and genealogy of 'conversation' in Coleridge's writing.[1] However, it's purchase on the spaces and traces of conversation in Coleridge's oeuvre is a series of discursive contexts, through which I read three of Coleridge's blank verse poems written between the years of 1795 and 1798: "The Nightingale," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," and "The Eolian Harp." Those contexts are the 18th century project of ballad revivalism; a series of public lectures delivered by Coleridge in Bristol in 1795; and Henry Nelson Coleridge's *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, a text that crystallizes a myth of Coleridge as talker. The body of the thesis is devoted to the narration of these three discursive scenarios and to my readings of the poetry as the particular, local expressions of these framing narratives.

Those familiar with the work of Coleridge will no doubt have already guessed that I have suppressed a generic descriptor by which these poems are known – indeed by which, I will argue, they are *always already* known. They are the 'conversation poems,' and my sampling of three is drawn from a wider grouping of Coleridge's poetry which, in its largest definitions has also included, "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," "Frost at Midnight," "Fears in Solitude," "Dejection: An Ode," "To William Wordsworth," and "Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouny."[2] However my

[2] The most inclusive set comes from Paul Magnuson, "Coleridge's Conversation Poems" in The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge

resistance to name the generic aegis under which these poems circulate should be understood as part of an effort to deconstruct a range of barriers that now stand between the poetry and contemporary students of Coleridge. They are barriers erected by G.M. Harper's *seminal* text *Spirit of Delight* and promulgated through M.H. Abrams essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," barriers which displace any so called 'conversational content' by way of formal and stylistic analysis.[3] While I take Harper and Abrams to be governing presences in our pedagogies, I would also stress that the force of their accounts' is generated by the particular institutional structures through which their formal/generic concept of the 'conversation poems' disseminates. I will map the genealogy of this practice and its institutional architecture in a moment, however, let me offer a description of an abandoned project that should crystallize both my own experience of the kind of blockage I sketched above (the obfuscation of the themes of 'conversation' – ballad revivalism, the public lectures, and the *Table Talk* – in the poetry), and explain the formation of my critical practice: a practice of activating the historical troping of 'conversation' within the poems I read.[4]

University Press, 2002), 32-44 I have used his set here because it produces the most routinely anthologized of the poems. And because it indicates that the formal grouping of these poems, initiated by G.M. Harper in 1928, still obtains in contemporary scholarship.

[3] A number of other texts perform the same kinds of formal and stylistic study: I name Harper and Abrams here because the former is the first to take this approach and the latter is its most widely read instantiation. For other examples see Graham Davidson, Coleridge's Career (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990), 18-47; Ann Matheson, "The Influence of Cowper's *The Task* on Coleridge's Conversation Poems" in New Approaches to Coleridge: Biographical and Critical Essays, ed. Donald Sultana (New Jersey: Vision Press, 1981), 137-150; Nicholas Reid, Coleridge, Form and Symbol or The Ascertaining Vision (Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), 61-82.

[4] Here I invoke Althusser's notion of a 'problematic' and Sartre's formulation of 'totalization.' The former can be described as the elucidation – through the process of analysis – of a set of questions which organize a group of texts. The latter describes the

I initially planned this thesis to be an inquiry into the frameworks of

enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinking which structured the 'conversation

poems.' My aim was to go beyond identifying various skeins of philosophical thought

embedded in the poetry's themes and argument. My goal was rather to activate a number

of philosophical discourses working themselves out through the poetry and to explore

these resonances at the level of form (this is a methodological ambition which I have

tried to adapt to the present purposes of this thesis). The former practice has been the aim

of studies like John Muir's *Coleridge as Philosopher*, G.N. Orsini's *Coleridge and

German Idealism* and a host of more recent essays, chapters, and articles such as G.S.

Morris' "Sound Silence and Voice in Meditation: Coleridge, Berkeley and the

Conversation Poems," Frederick Burwick's "Coleridge's Conversation Poems: Thinking

the Thinker," and Thomas R. Simons' "Coleridge Beyond Kant and Hegel: Transcendent

Aesthetics and the Dialectic Pentad," studies which, while academically *virtuosic*, seem

to amount to a game of spot the philosopher: indeed a game played with an old and

scratched magnifying glass.[5] Thus while my initial project took the parameters of

Coleridge's reading that have been well established by these studies as its point of

departure, it was one more deeply indebted, in both methodology and critical goal, to the

work of Paul Hamilton, who has demonstrated the debt to the structure and style of

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instantiation or activation of potential – though dormant – structures and energies through
praxis e.g. the French Revolution as the realization of latent class conflict created by a
structure of emergent capitalism and stored within the registers of bourgeois ideology.
[5] John Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1992), 35-82;
Gian N. G Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism, (Illinois: Southern Illinois UP); G.S.
Morris, "Sound Silence and Voice in Meditation: Coleridge, Berkeley and the
Conversation Poems," Christianity and Literature 55 (Fall 2005): 51-71; Frederick
Burwick, "Coleridge's Conversation Poems: Thinking the Thinker," Romanticism 14.2
(2008): 168-182; Thomas R. Simons, "Coleridge Beyond Kant and Hegel: Transcendent
Aesthetics and the Dialectic Pentad," Studies in Romanticism 45 (Fall 2006), 465-481

Kantian and Neo-Kantian thinking that obtains throughout much of Coleridge's prose

work.[6] My first prospectus sketched an intellectual history and set as its organizing

concern a problematic of subjectivity: it began with rationalism under the sign of

Descartes and the question of epistemological and ontological dualism and triple

substance; then traced through the empiricist and associationist accounts of Locke and

Hartley and the problems of the 'homunculus in the mind'; and into the German

philosophical tradition of idealism and critique, of world making subjects and the

conditions of that world's possibility, that is, it ended with Kant, Fitche, Schiller, the

Schlegel brothers, and Hegel.

       I rehearse the organizational features of this abandoned project because that

project took for granted, or rather took as its critical premise, the transparency of its

object, a poetic grouping (so called the 'conversation poems') conceived as a response to

a set of questions I sought to discover and explore. To put this more concretely, I

assumed that the conversation poems were a Coleridgean thought experiment, that is, I

assumed something of a doctrinal set which grew out of, rather than into a 'conversation'

rubric. My first project sought to formulate that rubric as range of questions to which I

already (though perhaps unconsciously) knew the answer, and to disavow its procedure

of wish fulfillment by delivering its findings in the manner of a *guilty thing surprised*

(though at the time I would not have paraphrased my project in such terms).

       I submitted that prospectus to Professor Adela Pinch who read it and commented

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[6] Paul Hamilton, <u>Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic</u> (New York: Continuum, 2007), <u>Coleridge's Poetics</u> (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), <u>Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and "Coleridge's Stamina" in <u>Repossessing The Romantic Past</u>, ed. Heather Glenn and Paul Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

that I might want to consider the fact that Coleridge did not coin the term 'conversation

poem' in its present usage. Rather the American critic G.M. Harper was the first to use

the term to describe a set of poetry, that is, *to put the term to use*. I take Professor

Pinch's observation, in light of what had been my own oversight, to indicate a larger

narrative of textual studies that has shaped our received notion of these poems i.e. how

we organize and continue to circulate this small inner canon and of course how we read

it.

Harper did in fact borrow the term from Coleridge himself. However, any sort of

historical specificity which the term might have enjoyed, either latently or manifestly, or

an account of the term's origin and editorial history is concealed by a rhetoric of

formalism and an ideology of the transhistorical, what he names 'the spirit of delight' that

inheres in each of the poems. Harper argues, "these are his poems of friendship …

composed as the expression of feelings which were occasioned by quite definite events."[7]

And of course the definite events which occasion the poems are not present to Harper's

account, rather they are flattened into a general rhetorical economy of friendship which

Harper identifies as their stylistic salient. The poems which Harper installed as

'conversation poems' are: "The Eolian Harp," "Reflections on Having Left a Place of

Retirement," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," "Fears in

Solitude," "The Nightingale," "Dejection: An Ode," and "To William Wordsworth."

However, Coleridge only used the phrase 'conversation poem' to describe one of the

texts listed above, "The Nightingale," a blank verse poem of roughly one hundred lines,

written in April of 1798. However, even that appellation carries uncertainties. The poem

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[7] George McLean Harper, <u>Spirit of Delight</u> (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1928), 4-5.

first appears in a letter to Wordsworth dated May 10th 1798. (*CL* 1:244) "The

Nightingale" is then incorporated into the 1798 text of the *LB* with the subtitle 'A

Conversational Poem' – an obvious add-on, since the verses of the letter contain no

exergue.[8] The poem is then reprinted without the subtitle, and simply as "The

Nightingale" in the subsequent editions of the *LB* (1800, 1802 and 1805) – the edition of

1800 being the first time the poem is printed in a volume in which its author is identified.

It is then gathered up in Coleridge's self edited volume containing "the whole of the

author's poetical compositions, from 1793 to the present date, with the exception of his

juvenile poems"[9], *Sibylline Leaves*. There the poem is filed under the genre of

'meditative poems in blank verse' and published as 'The Nightingale: a Conversation

Poem' alongside "Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode," "On Observing a

Blossom on the 1st of February," "The Eolian Harp," "Reflections on Having Left a Place

of Retirement," "To the Reverend George Coleridge," "This Lime-Tree Bower My

Prison," "To a Friend, Who Had Declared His Intention of Writing No More Poetry,"

"Frost at Midnight," "Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouny," "Inscription for

a Fountain on a Heath," "A Tombless Epitaph," and "To a Gentleman," all poems which

have run the gamut from frequently to rarely anthologized. The poems grouped together

in *Sibylline Leaves* do form the basis of Harper's set, however none of them, with the

exception of "The Nightingale" are designated as conversation poem until Harper affixes

to them that subtitle, and in the act of naming he banishes a score of other poems from

which he culls his list. I belabor this point, because Harper's text negates the

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[8] For textual history see *PW Variroum* 1:180.
[9] S.T. Coleridge, <u>Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems</u> (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), i.

bibliographic and reception histories of the term 'conversation poem,' and replaces those histories with an idealized scenario of poetic production: the *spirit of delight* manifests in the moment of composition, deposits its traces as the form of poem and thus binds together a categorical invention.

M.H Abrams 1965 essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" took its threefold taxonomy of the lyric (locatory prelude, flight of imagination, return/resolution/closure) from Harpers' own formal rubric, and took its objects of study from Harper's conversational group.[10] The wide circulation of Abram's text, its assimilation into a culture industry by way digitization, routine anthologization, abundant scholarly citation, and hyperlinked texts of the poetry both he and Harper consider, has no doubt shored up the conversation poems as a series of lyric performances, i.e. with the aid of advancements in medial technologies Abrams' text completes the task which Harper began some 80 years ago.[11] We might consider that the course syllabus is also a particularly powerful institutional apparatus, and a place where Abrams text often functions an introductory gloss on Romantic poetics. Thus even in the present moment where we routinely situate poems, to use Marjorie Levinson's formulation, 'within their contexts and contests,' I would argue that formalist and intellectual history modes of criticism still enjoy a forceful, if not governing presence within the critical and

[10] M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," ed. Frederick W. Hills and Harold Bloom From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle (New York: Oxford UP, 1965), 527-560.

[11] My troping of the term 'culture industry' is borrowed from T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's model of an institutional, ideological, and hegemonic matrix in which 'culture' is produced and circulated. Theodor Adorno, The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001), 61-106. For digital projects see http://etext.virginia.edu/stc/Coleridge/resources/conv_poems_essay.html.

pedagogical variorum of 'conversation poem' studies: and as a result these poems are

often received as philosophical and formal exercises by students new to the discipline of

Romanticism.[12] So while say Wordsworth's poetry has received a welter of formal-

materialist analysis: 'Tintern Abbey', 'Michael', 'The Ruined Cottage', 'Peele Castle',

'The Solitary Reaper', 'Resolution and Independence' and 'The Prelude' have to some

extent become bywords with a range of socioeconomic, political and industrial shifts in

British life contemporary to their composition[13] – with, in Jerome McGann's borrowed

phrase, 'local habitations and names' coded by their form – the 'conversation poems', in

spite of what is practically a simultaneous range of compositional dates, tend to signify

Abrams formulation of the Romantic lyric and not, say, Adorno's in "On Lyric Poetry

and Society."[14] In fact, I would go so far as to suggest (and this is in effect a

critical/methodological hinge of my thesis) that the 'conversation poem', as both genre

and as a particular articulation of the generic, obtains for us in the form of a metonymic

relationship to the Romantic Lyric – as it is gestured towards by Harper and pronounced

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[12] See Marjorie Levinson, "A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza," <u>Studies in Romanticism</u> 46 (Winter 2007): 367.

[13] The Wordsworth poems I name roughly run, in composition, between the dates of 1797 – 1805 while the compositional dates of the poems in Harper's set run between 1795- 1802. The textual histories for all these poems are of course extremely varied and have been taken up elsewhere, all I want from the comparison is a kind of macro historical frame. See, for example J.C.C. Mays, "Reflections on Having Edited Coleridge's Poems," in <u>Romantic Revisions</u> ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

[14] Adorno argues that the lyric poem is characterized by an internal negation of its historical (concrete/determinate) contexts, as a function of its resistance to the reification/commodification process. See Theodor W. Adorno, "On lyric Poetry and Society," in <u>Notes to Literature</u>, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Trans. Shierry Webber Nicholsen, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), vol. I, p.37.

as such by Abrams.[15] We might say that the single 'conversation poem' signifies [r]omantic [l]yric and the genre 'conversation poem' signifies [R]omantic [L]yric. Put in more concrete terms (the terms of this thesis), what I am suggesting is that the poems appear to us now as something of a form without a content, as 'conversational' in name only – that name calling up no referent.

To be sure there certainly have been a number of studies of the conversation poems which lay claim to a range of methodological historicisms. Kelvin Everest's brilliant, though often neglected book *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems* is a deep and meticulous account of the Coleridge's political, social, economic and cultural affiliations and points of contact during the years in which he composed the 'conversation poems.' Paul Magnuson's *Reading Public Romanticism* devotes a chapter to "The Politics of Frost at Midnight," which demonstrates the acute psychological and political valence a phrase like 'secret ministry,' which opens the poem, would have carried.[16] These historical exegeses have failed to appraise, however, the generically signifying status that the 'conversation poems' should produce for us. In a word, there is no sense of 'conversation' itself in their accounts, no concept of the multivocal registers in which the term 'conversation' can be said to express itself, and no

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[15] With metonymic here I intend its simplest usage, that of distinction between metaphor, symbol and or simile. The former three tropes might be characterized by a rhetorical structure that maintains difference by way complementarity under the sign of a single attribute, playing out quite literally in the case of *metaphor* as an arrested dialectic – tenor and vehicle do not overtake one another constituting a new third term by way of synthesis and cancellation, but rather the two terms remain suspended and mutually constitutive approaching synthesis only as a sign curve approaches its limit. Metonymy, however, completes the task of subsumption which metaphor began, thus canceling out the particular and installing it as the image of the universal.

[16] Kelvin Everest, Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems, (Sussex: Harvester, 1979), 13-68 and 97-145; Paul Magnuson, Reading Public Romanticism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), 67-94.

effort to read any discursive valences of 'conversation' back into the poetry. My effort in this thesis, as I stated at its outset, is to introduce several foci of conversation, and to read the poetic project of each conversation poem I have selected as either the internal negation or reproduction of that discourse.

To this end, my first chapter attempts to situate "The Nightingale" within the context of 18th century ballad revivalism. 'Conversation' here takes the form of post-structuralist semiotics, phonemic languages and their critiques of logocentricity. I see the project of ballad revivalism as a social and economic process through which oral poetries become texts, and I term this macro-historical narrative *Literalization*, a term which I adapt from literary theorist Pascale Casanova. I trace this narrative through its roots in the ethnographic project of Thomas Percy – whom I take to represent a larger nationalist agenda of producing a natural history of British poetry – to the commercialization of ballad literatures: a process which Percy's project at once opens up and seeks to discourage. The tension here, between the translation of ballads for 'academic' and or 'high cultural' interests, and their commodification is one which, I argue, crystalizes an epistemic rupture between past and present, between modernity and antiquity. My reading of "The Nightingale" maps out the formal coding of this narrative. I attempt to read the poem's themes and argument against its formal structure, and I see this method as activating "The Nightingale's" project to resist its own poetic production. However, the deconstructive poetics here is, I argue, an effect of the social and historical context in which the poem is composed, that is, the moment of ballad revivalism.

My second chapter focuses on the public lecture as a conversational form. I develop this structure of monologism into what I call the 'conversational fetish,' which I

see operating in a series of lectures delivered by Coleridge in Bristol in 1795. The lectures focus a literal picture of the 'turning awry' in disavowal of an implicit break in communication between orator and auditor. I believe it is also the larger historical and small scale social context in which Coleridge comes to deliver these lectures which motivates their oratorical procedures of disavowal. I then read the formal reproduction of this 'turning awry' into Coleridge's poem "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." I see the poem as disavowing its own signatures of loss in which it begins, and I argue that the poem is able to sublimate these original losses through a performative grammar. I offer the 'conversational fetish' as an alternative to the many critical accounts which emphasize the rhetorical intimacy and idealistic altruism of this particular poem (though these arguments often attempt to make a case for the poetry more generally). Rather I show the poetic project to be one in the service of a reconstitution of the subject of the poem, Coleridge himself. Masked by mere gestures towards externality and consolation.

My third and final chapter takes on Coleridge's reputation as a talker. Here I identify the recursive structures that govern that myth, and their operations within Henry Nelson Coleridge's *Table Talk*. Because the poem I read in this chapter, "Eolian Harp," is composed prior to the 'conversaitonal context' I develop here, I use the poem as a lens through which to study both the recursive structure of language in general, and to consider how that recursive structure informs what Coleridge referred to as, 'the all in each' of his discourse, a formulation which helps to illuminate some of the editorial procedures and aesthetical claims of the *Table Talk*. Because the *Table Talk* is a project undertaken by another to record Coleridge's 'thinking' and 'conversation,' it is often a project which comments on its own production. To this end, I use the poem, in addition

to material from the volume itself, opportunistically, to illuminate and exploit a number of ironies inherent to a text like the *Table Talk*.

Conversation under these various headings thus materializes for us today as an interest. And my effort to read the tropes of 'conversation' I produce as 'contexts' back into the poems is a maneuver which should restore some original force to the term, and at the same time adapt it to interests of the present day. I hope to construct, in other words, a new rubric under which we might continue to study these poems.

CHAPTER 1

Ballads and Nightingales

<p style="text-align:center;">**I**</p>

As I stated in my introduction, the largest aim of this thesis is to set aside our
received notion of the 'conversation poems' as a set of meditative exercises, or as the
conscious dramatization of certain philosophical questions that we have come to associate
with high romantic lyricism. While it has long been a productive move to examine the
various skeins of idealist and materialist thought at war within these texts, one way to start
troubling this notion, rather than group them under the rubric of *lyric*, is to locate the
'conversation poems' composition within the context of 18th century ballad revival. This
sort of re-contextualization should begin to recover certain formal, thematic and social
tropings of the poetry's dialogic historical situation. In this chapter I will read ballad
revivalism as the working out of a narrative, and as the internal reproduction of that
narrative within "The Nightingale." This re-framing should produce some new interest in
that initial 'conversation poem,' which is to say that it should will allow us to read "The
Nightingale" with renewed currency in its original bibliographic context, as the fourth
poem in the 1798 text of the *Lyrical Ballads* (hereafter referred to as *LB*), and it should
recast some of the poem's most distinct formal features as effects of its situation within
the story of ballad revivalism.

However, before activating certain balladic features and themes in "The
Nightingale," I isolate a framing moment of graphic orality in the text, both as an emblem

of the textual oral/aural experience of poetry I will be studying and, so as to suggest

Coleridge's interest in the graphonic functions of language as he undertook to compose *LB*

with Wordsworth.[17]

Several of the poems composed between 1795 and 1798, including "Eolian Harp,"

"France and Ode," "Frost at Midnight," "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison," and "The

Nightingale," feature the inscription ΕΣΤΗΣΕ, typographically set as the poems'

signature.[18] The signature uses a Greek syllabary to phoneticize Coleridge's initials:

acting like a phonetic score, a script to pronunciation or something that approximates

musical notation. When read aloud the letters sound ess, tee, see, the initials **S.T.C** –

Coleridge's full monogram. I use this gesture to reveal a certain cognitive and linguistic

operation. We see (and hear), through the *act* of reading out loud (or aloud in the mind, so

to speak), that meaning arises. The signature gestures towards a purely phonetic language,

in this way challenging our assumptions about linguistic semiology. Through its

foregrounding of voice (or voicedness), of sound detached from its semiotic embodiment,

the signature forces a particular kind of reading experience, what Garret Stewart has

appropriately named *phonemic reading*.[19] Phonemic practice, so named for its

simultaneous privileging and deconstruction of the phoneme, necessitates a moment of

vocalization and reception. It is an experience that is located in a uniquely somatic and

cerebral space, where to read, even to one's self, is to suppress one's own or another's

voice; phonemic reading is to read aloud silently, to read silently aloud and imagine

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[17] I place oral in the primary position of this split, not to name its priority, but to suggest the hesitancy with which I make that split – a split I would like to put under erasure.

[18] See *PW Variorum*, 1:115, 156, 171, 174, 180. The signature appends to the version of the poem submitted in the letter to Wordsworth.

[19] Garrett Stewart, Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 5-10.

oneself hearing ones own voice; a voice; the voice in the text; the voice of the text. It is an abject kind of reading; a kind of reading that troubles boundaries. In the phonemic occasion, the division between self and other (one's own voice or the voice of another reproduced in one's own head) and the boundary between inside and outside break down as we imagine the reproduction of voice intruding upon our consciousness, piercing our mind's ear. It is a practice that both mimics iteration, speech, and recreates it in its absence. In effect, phonemic reading lays claim to the self-generative power of language, putting under erasure the idea of speech as the trace of the logos and the text as the trace of speech, i.e. it forces a reconsideration of logo-centricity which, as Derrida argued, structures the tradition of western metaphysics. And by putting logo-centricity under erasure, phonemic reading makes a problem of the notion of language as a system of transcendental signs activated through parole and captured through langue. Rather phonemic reading and writing reframes language as an enactive instance: a uniquely temporal medium where writing and reading occur in time (as in instantaneous); and a self-generative medium where language continually inscribes and re-inscribes itself upon the reader/listener within that momentary space (instantiating).

Coleridge's signature sets a challenge to the philological exercise of finding meaning by tracing the exclusively textual circulation of words. Instead it forces upon the conscious ear of the reader a consideration of the aural/oral experience of language. Perhaps we might hear Coleridge's allusion to the poet, "who hath been building up the rhyme,"(l. 24 *PW* 1:180)[20] in an entirely different register, that is, as importuning the performative functions of a text. Such an allusion might thus remind us of the ballad's

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[20] All line references in this chapter to "The Nightingale" refer to the *PW* text.

interest to produce an affective/effective response, a response built up through a poetics of

sympathy, fear, anger, cheer etc. Indeed this critical maneuver, of reading balladic tropes

back into "The Nightingale," and reading the signature against that text, raises a larger

question about authorship, a question arising from the destabilization of textuality as well.

If we begin to conceive of a practice of reading and writing which produces an abject

experience (the dissolution of the deep categorical divide between self and other, inside

and outside, center and circumference), what might it mean to think about a text that

categorically denies any claims to a strict reader–author dichotomy, one in which the

reader is no longer figured as a receptacle for meaning.[21]

For all the signature's success as phonemic inscription, it needs to be noted that it

fails to generate a new kind of poetic language. That project, a full scale reorganization of

language along the lines of onomatopoeia, becomes the aim the language poetries of the

20th century avant-gardes. The effort, however, to produce a poetry/poetics of pure

design, i.e. poetry which sloughs off the stain of its cultural circulation, does not

materialize in the Romantic period. I bring this up because it will be important to a

reading of the disjuncture between the rhetorical effect of the signature and the failed

aesthetic project of "The Nightingale," a disjuncture between mimetic and post-structural

poetics which is crystallized by the larger situation of *LB*, that of Romanticism's

encounter with and reproduction of its past. *LB* is a work, after all, containing ballads

written in traditional form, such as "We Are Seven" and "The Anciente Marynere" (to use

Coleridge's antiqued spelling, itself an instancing of this reproduction) but it is also a

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[21] For a different take on the relationship between author, text and reader see J. Hillis
Miller, "The Critic as Host" in Harold Bloom et al., eds., Deconstruction and Criticism
(New York: Continuum, 1979), 217-254.

work that closes with "Tintern Abbey" – perhaps now the signal poem of romantic lyricism in all its present forms – and it contains the first (though compositionally one of the last) of the 'conversation poems,' "The Nightingale."

As we know, the revival of the ballad form in 18th Century Britain is an old topic in the study of Romanticism. By old I mean that the genre itself represents a kind of literary and national or ethnic antiquity, but I also mean that the study of ballad revival is, in many senses connate with the birth of Romantic studies as a field of scholarly discourse. In this, latter sense, the ballad revival is a topic introduced, roughly, towards the middle of the 19th century. Work on the relationship of the Romantic to the bardic tradition is taken up as early as 1877 by H.B. Wheatley in an introduction to his edition of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry*, and in his text *Ballads and Ballad Writers*. The investment in the antiquarian interests of Romantic poetry is continued in the work of W.P. Kerr in *On the History of the Ballad* (1909) and linked to Wordsworth and Coleridge specifically, by Charles Wharton Stork in his 1914 essay The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth and Coleridge.[22]

The study of ballad revival might be characterized as an effort to explore the origins of a Romantic past that reaches further back than our contemporary sense of the

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[22] Albert Barron Friedman, The Ballad Revival; Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 1-15; Charles Whatron Stork, "The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth and Coleridge," PMLA (29:1914): 299-326. For more recent discussion of what ballad texts Coleridge had read and engaged with see R. A. Benthall, "New Moons, Old Ballads, and Prophetic Dialogues in Coleridge's 'Dejection an Ode,'" Studies in Romanticism 37 (Winter 1998): 591-614; Coleridge's Dejection: The Earliest Manuscripts and the Earliest Printings, ed. Stephen Maxwell Parrish, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 1-21 and "Leaping and Lingering: Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads" in Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver, ed. Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985).

period as well.[23] The term Romantic is, as we know, to some extent an anachronistic

projection.[24] The point at which we can locate British Romanticism's self consciousness,

that is, a Romantic Period understanding of what we now think of as Romantic, is

extremely difficult to pin-point. It cannot be said that any one school of thought held

sway over the philosophy and poetics of British Romantics. Simply put, all I want out of

the anachronism is to exploit a connection we often gloss over. That is, the early work of

Wheatley, Kerr, Wharton et al., did not take its cues from a deeply ironized understanding

of Romantic poetry, an understanding which, for Coleridge studies, was largely developed

by I. A. Richard's in *Coleridge's Imagination*.[25] Rather their accounts grew out of

immediate institutional circumstances, and the historical situation of the poetry; as such it

was work which observed a Romanticism not so much bound up with an emergent

secularism, but with that root word, *romance*, a root often buried under the cultural

associations that have shaped today's understanding of the field. What the early criticism

could not explicitly elaborate but could nonetheless indicate simply by its proximity to its

object of study, was, however, Romanticism's links to its past, its obsession with heritage

and parentage. I hope to construct these "indices" into a newly inflected theory of

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[23] That sense, given a kind of revival of the ballad revival in Romantic studies, is beginning to come under pressure. See for example Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, Janet Sorensen, eds., <u>Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

[24] Stuart Curan, for example, has argued that a self-consciously romantic Anglo-Romanticism can only be said to take hold after the turn of the 19th Century. Curan sites the prominence of a series of lectures delivered by A.W Schlegel in 1809, and translated into English by 1815, as the first full scale articulation within a popular British space, of the now familiar concepts of Romanticism: irony, fragmentation, meta-fiction etc. Stuart Curan, <u>Poetic Form and British Romanticism</u> (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 128-157 Also see Katie Trumpener, <u>Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and The British Empire</u> (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 37-127.

[25] See I.A. Richards, <u>Coleridge on Imagination</u> (New York: Norton, 1950), 44-80.

Romanticism's confrontation with and idealization of its own most immediate history, a theory of ballad revivalism as the site of encounter between modernity and antiquity, and of *LB* and "The Nightingale" as the expression of that encounter.[26]

II

The 1723 publication of the anonymously edited, *A Collection of Old Ballads*, by the major London printer James Roberts, marks the earliest consideration of ballad revivalism for my purposes. The project gathered into a single volume a series of Metrical Romances, Ballads, Tales and Lyrics, ranging from the early 17th century back into a professed un-datable antiquity. The edition is leaden with head and footnotes assembled by its anonymous editor, notes which draw comparisons between style, language, origin and authenticity. They are notes which effectively create an interpretive frame for the work, signaling the very fact that these ballads are something novel to the contemporary reader, in need of further elucidation. The work is also accompanied by a preface which stresses, as Dianne Dugaw has argued, a pedagogical role they might play.[27] The preface claims, "many children, [who] never would have learn'd to read, had they not took a delight in poring over *Jane Shore* and *Fair Rosamond*."[28]

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[26] In fact, we might think of the cultural-linguistic effects of ballad revivalism, its popularization of the anglo-germanic roots and structures of the English language, as laying the groundwork for *LB's* own linguistic project: its effort to abandon the Latinate vernaculars of Pope and Dryden in search of a new poetic lexicon.

[27] See Dianne Dugaw, "The Popular Marketing of 'Old Ballads': The Ballad Revival and Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism Reconsidered," Eighteenth Century Studies 21:1 (Fall 1997): 71 Hereafter cited in text.

[28] A Collection of Old Ballads, 3 vols. (London: J. Roberts, 1723-1725), vii The first two volumes of the collection where published in 1723, the third was published by James

I pause for a moment to produce Sartre's account of generational difference and differentiation in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, here, as the theoretical scaffolding on which I hang my own narrative of ballad revivalism. Sartre argues, "each generation separates itself from the previous one and, *as a material condition of its praxis*, transcends the objectification of the previous praxis…this being [the previous generation's] becomes, through this very transcendence, an inert object which needs to be rearranged."[29] And I adapt the term *literalization*, coined in another context by Pascale Casanova, to depict ballad revivalism as a double process that operates in a similar fashion to Sartre's model.[30]

Literalization, in its incipient stage marks off literature as purely textual entity, or as that which can be circulated through the material apparatus of print culture. In this process, media that may have existed in multiple forms gets flattened and transcribed into print. The literacy project outlined by the preface to *A Collection*, for example, describes precisely the transcription of an oral culture into a print one. The second stage of *literalization* is the commoditization of the literary: the introduction of 'texts,' qua material productions, to the economic pressures of the marketplace, and consequently the proliferation of those texts within the popular social realms. It is in this second sense that the literacy project (which, as we have seen, is only a function of the first stage of transcription) truly becomes a project, that is, *A Collection* is thus instrumentalized by its editor to serve a larger political agenda of literacy in the preservation of a national identity

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Roberts in 1725, see Michael Treadwell, "London Trade Publishers 1675-1750," The Library, Sixth Series, vol. 4 (1982): 99

[29] Jean Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, 2 vols. (London: Verso, 2004), vol. 1 p. 666

[30] Casanova uses the term to describe a process of contestation in a *republic of world letters*, whereby minor languages and literatures are often suppressed in the national struggle for cultural capital. Pascale Casanova, The World Republic of Letters Trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), 9-44

– an agenda carried out by the print houses which produced and widely circulated the text.[31]

A Collection serves a largely ideological function as well, the dialectical synthesis of the first two movements. The processes of transcription which brought *A Collection* into being as text (as a collection of texts) are at once acknowledged as the losses of an oral history and refigured by its editor as the gains of a literate nation. The logic of transcription which governs this double position of *A Collection*, inaugurates and proliferates a movement to establish the 'past' as an objective thru-line in the present, a thru line which props up England's ethnic and geographic claims to nationhood. The collection and authenticization (established through rubrics of ethnic and regional analysis) of autochthonous English verse is the dominant mode in which this project gets carried out.

Thomas Percy, a name now synonymous with ballad revivalism – along with names like James Hogg, Walter Scott and Joseph Ritson – would trope and elaborate the claims made by *A Collection* in his own preface to the 1767 edition of *The Reliques of English Poetry*. Percy writes, "The minstrels were an order of men in the middle ages, who united the arts of poetry and music, and sung verses to the harp of their own composing."[32] There is an emphasis on the improvisational character of the verse, and on the long tradition of a kind of poetry which fuses speech and music. 'Composing' here

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[31] Benedict Anderson's old but still useful examination of the role of print culture in the formation of national identity makes a similar argument. Literacy, for Anderson, becomes the force of national cohesion, that is, literacy creates and sustains the nation as an imagined community. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 2006), 37-46 and 83-112

[32] Thomas Percy, Four Essays: As Improved and Enlarged in the Second Edition of The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, [London, 1767], Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, University of Michigan, 15 Mar, 2009, 3. Hereafter cited in text.

does not refer to the writing down of literatures, but rather to the improvising of lyric and musical performance.

Percy stakes his discovery of the anthropological category of 'minstrel' on a distinction between 'song' – the bardic tradition – and 'poetry,' that which was "cultivated by men of letters indiscriminately." Poetry is uniquely literal, 'song' serves as its naturalized pre-literal communicative counterpart. Percy goes on to claim, referring to the class of 'minstrel', "I have no doubt but most of the old heroic ballads in the collection were composed by this order of men. For altho' some of the larger metrical romances might come from the pen of monks or others, yet the smaller narratives were probably composed by the minstrels, who sung them."(5) It is a distinction, however, which Percy must put under erasure so as to draw his own thru-line from past to present. Percy's *invention* of the minstrel is the fiction which heals the breach between oral and print cultures (when composition is an oral enterprise and otic form of transmission, carried out professionally by the minstrel), between past and present, antiquity and modernity: a rupture that ballad revivalism and he himself have wrought. The origins of his *Reliques*, their coming into being as *reliques*, is precisely what he must write under erasure.

Percy continues, "The minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient bards, who under different names, were admired and revered from the earliest ages, among the people of Gaul, Britain, Ireland and the North."(3) Here Percy lays claim to a genealogy of poetic transmission via purely oral means. Indeed the songs circulate in cultural memory, and through the medium, or conduit of the 'bard' and his primogeniture, the 'minstrel'. The tradition stretches back, like *A Collection*'s contents, to an un-datable antiquity. The prefatory essay, and the project of *Reliques*, is one that cannot be separated

from its political aims, as it makes its case for the natural history of British poetry based ethnic and geographic claims. And through these claims the text constructs a coherent fiction of British identity. The prefatory essay continues to trace its history up until the present day, all the while foregrounding the figures of 'bard' and 'minstrel' as the loci which link the present conditions of Britishness it proposes to what it must produce as an imagined past. Percy's procedure of writing this operation under erasure is a familiarly Romantic one (cf. Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood").[33] It is a narrative fiction of convenience, one which suggests that phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny: or in Percy's lexicon, that we find in these minstrels our own origins.

The genealogical argument carries the freight of Percy's nationalistic claim, but it is paradoxical in its construction. The idea that the phylogenic development of man should somehow mimic the various ontogenetic stages of mankind is a structure which is infinitely self-referential. A claim to phylogenic progress is underwritten by a larger ontogenetic narrative, and that ontogenetic narrative too is necessarily validated by its phylogenic correlative. What we have, in this infinitely referential construction, is a process which reveals the very absence or impossibility of its origin. It is a circular construct, father, that is, of itself.

The proliferation of Percy's claims, his bardic ideology, was precisely a function of the advancements in print technologies occurring simultaneously within and

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[33] William Wordsworth, Selected Poems and Prefaces, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 186. Also see Paul de Man on "Anthropomorphism and Trope in The Lyric" in The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 237-262

engendering the larger movement of ballad revivalism itself.[34] Percy's relatively small

scale academic project – in spite of its enormous pretensions – would not have gained the

kind of cultural currency a number of critics have suggested it enjoyed, without specific

material advantages.[35] The efficacy of printing and the changes in paper fibres which

made production cheap allowed for the proliferation of so called broadside and

commodity ballad texts that espoused ancient nationalistic claims similar to those made by

Percy, in addition to making Percy's own text available to a wider audience. Indeed the

very nomenclature for this phenomenon in print culture, 'the broadside,' takes its name

precisely from the mechanical advancement which enabled its production, the press which

specifically accommodated the printing of large, single sheet folio papers that could

display both the letter and score so integral to, but indicative of the condensation of the

ballad into purely textual relique. Indeed broadside ballads, which fittingly have also been

referred to as commodity ballads for their large scale industrial production, came pouring

out of popular print houses like the Bow-Church-Yard of William and Cluer Dicey,

flooding the London book market from the mid 18th to 19th Century. What the broadside

movement of ballad revivalism in fact represents is the utter flexibility of capital, the

ability of the market to subsume cultural production and dissolve the traces of autonomy.

The autonomy, or aura, as I have been arguing, was never fully present itself, but rather, as

Benjamin notes in "The Work of Art in Its Age of Technological Reproducibility," only

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[34]For a full scale explanation of the changes in the literary production technology – which forms the basis of my own analysis here – see Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin <u>The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800</u>, Trans. David Gerard, eds. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: N.L.B., 1976), especially 29-49 on changes in paper and a discussion of the woodcut.

[35] For the reach of Percy's text see Nick Groom, <u>The Making of Percy's Reliques</u> (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 193-236

materializes as capitalism's retrospective construction of *originality*.[36] Originality is more

accurately the fetishization of originality, connate with the work of art's coming into being

– the age of the work of art's *technological reproducibility* is its age of being, the rest is

purely ideational.[37]

Figures like Percy, through their anthropological imaginings driven by an

ethnographic and nationalistic desire to fetishize an English past, truly lay the

epistemological groundwork for the creation of an ideology of the ballad, one reified and

proliferated through the industrial structures of a print economy. Percy's own claims to

have discovered a poetic/perfromative tradition that stretched back into the 12th Century –

that is, before that tradition dissolved into the vicissitudes of a pre-history – are likewise

assimilated into the commodity culture of ballad revivalism (the second movement of

literalization). As Dianne Dugaw has pointed out, by 1754, the Dicey's had begun an

advertising campaign that stressed a variety of "Old" ballads, including those which

professed their claims to a national heritage beyond the immediate reach of history.

(Dugaw 80)

The mobilization of advertising to invent and privilege the *antiquarian* status of

what were commercially produced texts, performs the complete subsumption of use into

exchange values through its production of an *aesthetic of oldness*. That is, what had

already been invented as the ballad's claim to regional and historical specificity gets co-

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[36] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in Its Age of Technological Reproducibility," in
The Work of Art in Its Age of Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on
Media, Edmund Jephcott et al., Trans., Michael W. Jennings et al., eds. (Cambridge:
Harvard UP, 2008), 19-55
[37] Projects like Percy's also confirm another of Benjamin's observations, "there is not
document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism." Walter
Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations Trans. Harry Zohn, ed.
Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 256

opted by the force of the market and transformed into pure economic interest: the 'oldness,' that is, is worked directly into the structures of a political economy of literary production.[38] The aesthetic of 'oldness' which comes to organize ballad literatures of the revival (what Susan Stewart has termed the 'distress' of its genre) represents the tensions between the present's interest to identify the past qua 'past' and a desire to heal the epistemic rupture which produced the past as history.[39] History, here represented as the narrative of ballad revivalism, materializes as an epistemic rupture, refigured as an ontological contiguity. And I would add that distress also indexes the economic interests of that project.

Coleridge certainly had read Percy's *Reliques*, and would have been keenly aware of the proliferation of the broadside movement, when he reflects in a notebook entry,

> Why do you make a book? Because my Hands can only extend but a few score inches from my body; because my poverty keeps those hands empty when my Heart aches to empty them; because my Life is short, & my Infirmities; & because a Book, if it extends but to one Edition, will probably benefit three or four whom I could not otherwise have acted; &

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[38] I want to emphasize again that Percy's project should not be read as sensitive to the local habitations of ballads, rather he too conceived of his project along a similar axis of use and exchange values, and is guilty of what Maureen McLane has referred to as raiding the northern border between England and Scotland for anyone he could find who claimed to know or possess ballads, romances or lyrics. For a discussion of other 'border raiding' projects and their ethnographic and anthropological motivations see Maureen McLane Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008); Penny Fielding, Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture and Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ina Ferris, "Pedantry and the Question of Enlightenment History: The Figure of the Antiquary in Scott," European Romantic Review 13 (September 2002): 273

[39] See Susan Stewart, Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 66-102

should it live & deserve to live, will make ample Compensation for all the

afore-stated Infirmities. O but think only of the thoughts, feelings[,]

radical Impulses that have been imparted in how many thousands of

thousands by that little Ballad of the Children in the Wood! The sphere of

Alexander the Great's Agency is trifling compared with it. (*CN* 1:620)[40]

The passage begins by posing a question to an imagined auditor, 'why do *you* make a

book?' however we quickly find that the question becomes the occasion for an interior

monologue as the 'you' slips into 'my'. The subject of the passage – the figure whom we

realize imagined someone else posing the question – argues that a book performs what

manual labor cannot, that is, it may extend beyond the present reach of the author. And

yet, in so much as the text becomes individuated, it is figurally linked to the processes of

manual production. Its objective form, the 'volume,' might only 'extend' to a single

edition, the phraseology implicitly linking the sphere of influence of 'the book' back with

the rather limited and immediate reach of the body; both hands and books only 'extend' so

far. The metaphor also inscribes its own limitations. While the initial

production/individuation of 'the book' was associated with a disburdening, 'my heart

seeks to empty them', that same process is immediately refigured along the axes of use

and exchange values. The extension to an 'edition,' 'the book's' reified commodity form,

is refigured as the limits to capital. The stain of 'the book's' exchange value, its ability to

'make ample Compensation for all those afore-stated Infirmities,' forces Coleridge to

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[40] Cathleen Coburn notes that this entry is most likely recorded from a fragment of conversation between Coleridge and Godwin, which was apparently reported to Sir Humphrey Davey in a letter on Jan 1st 1800. The date of the conversation is itself unknown, however, there is no reason to that Coleridge had not read Percy's second edition, which contained the ballad to which Coleridge refers, by 1798 when he began to compose "The Nightingale." (*CN Notes* 1:620)

imagine a scenario of literary production which somehow avoids the

commodification/reification binary. The solution to this problem is the ballad form, or

rather its anti-commodity imagined form as a poetry which imparts (suggesting

performance, rather than writing) its influence to a limitless audience. While the notebook

entry effectively fetishizes the ballad as a from of resistance, "The Nightingale," carries

the logic of the narrative of *literalization* one step further, both proposing and

deconstructing the commodification of that form.

III

I would like to read the historical narrative of *literalization* I have been developing

back into Coleridge's "The Nightingale."[41] However, let me first address its original

bibliographic context. **"**The Nightingale" was not included in the initial printings of the

first edition of the *LB*, run off by Joseph Cottle in Bristol in June of 1798.[42] Those initial

printings contained Coleridge's supernatural ballad, "Lewti." "The Nightingale" was a

late substitution to the 1798 volume, replacing "Lewti" in the early printings. In fact,

Coleridge did not send the poem to Wordsworth to be considered for the volume until

May 10th 1798. Coleridge makes his case for the poem's suitability to a volume such as

LB in the letter he sent to Wordsworth in Alfoxden, the letter where the text of "The

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[41] Such a reading begs a certain, difficult, methodological question. How do we uncover
the historical situation of a poem that does not begin with loco-description, nor with an
exergue like 'lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey'. "The Nightingale," as I
will try to show, begins precisely outside the possibility of an historical moment, in a
sense, in no time at all. The elision of its scene of composition, I suggest, is characteristic
of its effort to step outside its position in history.

[42] *PW Variorum* 1:180

Nightingale" first appears. The following fragment, which is composed in ballad form, is submitted as its preface:

> In stale blank verse a subject stale
>
> I send per post my Nightingale;
>
> And like an honest bard, dear Wordsworth,
>
> You'll tell me what you think, my Bird's worth.
>
> My own opinion's briefly this –
>
> His bill he opens not amiss;
>
> And when he has sung a stave or so,
>
> His breast & some small space bellow,
>
> So throbs & swells, that you might swear
>
> No vulgar music's working there.
>
> So far, so good; but then, 'od rot him!
>
> There's something falls off at his bottom.
>
> Yet, sure, no wonder should it breed.
>
> That my bird's Tail's a tail indeed
>
> And makes its own inglorious harmony
>
> Aeolio crepitu, non carmine (*CL* 1:244)

The fragment plainly puns on the staleness of a poetic subject like a nightingale, made staler still by the poem's composition in stale blank verse. Why Wordsworth -- the fragment begs -- should a poem whose themes and argument seem to run counter to the revolutionary claims of a project like *LB* be included?

Coleridge anatomizes his bird to explain the workings of his poem, and to defend against the possible reasons for its exclusion. He doesn't want something rotten to fall off at the bottom, that is, Coleridge playfully assures us that his bird does not simply finish by producing its own excrement – a wonderful, digestive metaphor for poesis as consumption and composition – but that it creates its own inglorious harmony. In a figural sense, the bird's tail is both tale (a successful story, a ballad) and tail (a feature worthy of its plumage and its place as the poem's final stanza, its tail end). The pun also produces its double meaning through phonemic writing/reading, that is, in the act of our own internal vocalization, the word slips somewhere in-between 'tail' and 'tale.'

Coleridge's playful allusion to 'tails' and 'tales' should be our first indication that "The Nightingale," despite its regularized meter and blank verse style, is self consciously written about Ballads. As the contexts I have been developing demonstrate, the ballad revival and the ballad text function as metonyms for the entire narrative of literalization, and as a point of convergent interests for Coleridge and Wordsworth. By the time the poem had been composed and suggested for *LB*, the project had already more or less taken its determinate shape. The advertisement had been composed and *LB* was to be a collection of poems, written largely in ballad form, with a few of the poems composed in blank verse; and in the manner of *A Collection*, it was to be published anonymously. I produce the framing text of the letter and sketch this brief scenario for the composition of "The Nightingale" because it should encourage us to think of the poem as a meditation on, in addition to being constitutive of, certain established themes of the volume.[43] Namely, it

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[43] Wordsworth's contributions are also structured by their performance of orality and spoken communication. Consider a poem like *The Thorn*, where the mystery plot turns around hearsay and miscommunication, or the *Female Vagrant*, where we never hear the

should frame our thinking of conversation under the sign of oral and dialogic features of language and poetics.

> The poem begins,
>
> No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
>
> Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
>
> Of sullen Light, no obscure trembling hues.
>
> Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!
>
> You see the glimmer of the stream beneath.
>
> But hear no murmuring: it flows silently
>
> O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still, (ll. 1-7)

We might call this opening strophe topo-descriptive, in that the implied speaker refers to both a topographic scene, but also to a tropological feature of the poem, namely the impossibility of that scene to exist as an objective or historical moment. The initial lines create a liminal atmosphere. In typical Coleridgean fashion the scene rests on the edge of day and night, where already our *sense* of the material world has been muddled. However, in so much as that scene manifests as the liminal space which dwells in the division between day and night, a division knowable through signatures of the visible, that liminality is itself further complicated by the fact that, as the phrases 'no relique of the sunken day' and 'no obscure trembling hues' suggest, we cannot see or grasp the presence of the distinction either, rather that liminal space can only manifest as an absence. If twilight – the ostensible occasion which Coleridge describes – is posited as a distinct time,

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vagrant's own story but rather, her tale is spoken for her, mediated by both the implied poet and several other characters.

as that space which marks itself off as the transitional period between day and night, then

the poem's opening lines also begin to deconstruct that same liminality upon which they

first staked the division. Liminality, as an in-between space, thus itself becomes

something which can be endlessly subdivided when we remove its delimiting frames,

'reliques of the sunken day' and 'obscure trembling hues'. In effect, the poem's opening

stanza, what I called its topodescriptive movement, de-centers its subject, and the reader,

collapsing time in upon itself while imploring us to linger in the moment of aporia, 'come,

we will rest on this mossy bridge!,'

The scene betrays an epistemic rupture which it seeks to heal into an ontological

contiguity on the individual level. However the deconstruction of the single moment, in

which time collapses in upon itself, can also be transposed onto a macro-narrative of

history. The desire to dwell outside of time, if time is figured as change, is a desire to seal

oneself off from the painful encroachment of those weathering processes. The word

relique, should stand out in this context. It should signify Percy's *Reliques of English

Poetry*. As both an emblem for the entire process of ballad revival, and as the

nominal/objective/reified/commodity product of that narrative, it is not surprising that it

has been suppressed by the poem. We recall that the 'relique' comes into being as the

present's effort to represent the past to itself through the *material conditions of its praxis*,

the present in so doing individuates itself as a distinct generation. And yet the 'relique'

also connotes that that project of negation cannot help but bear the traces of the past which

it seeks to cancel out. In other words, in spite of Coleridge's insistence that the poem

begins where and when there is 'no relique of the sunken day,' that internal negation

signals to us the poem's efforts to step outside the moment in which it is situated by

resisting its own poetic production: a refusal on the part of Coleridge to produce his own *Relique of English Poetry*. Within the economy of the poem itself, the absence of a 'relique,' however, registers as a presence.

The poem deploys other rhetorical techniques to effectively unsettle our *sense* of the moment. The stream which flows beneath the bridge towards which we have been summoned is visible, we behold 'the glimmer' but 'hear no murmuring: it flows silently / o'er its soft bed of verdure.' Murmuring functions as an onomatopoetic moment, wherein the stream speaks its own trickling presence by overflowing the line with that extra, irregular syllable, *ing*. While Coleridge insists that we 'hear no murmuring' the line performs a formal deconstruction of its proposition by forcing us to hear the murmuring which Coleridge has suppressed. Again, an effect of the poem's effort to un-write itself – or the threats of its form to deconstruct its content.

Suddenly the song of the nightingale bursts in upon the poem's framing scene, and becomes the occasion for a thematic consideration of poetry itself,

And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,

"most musical, most melancholy" bird!

A melancholy Bird? O idle thought!

In Nature there is nothing melancholy.

– But some night-wandering man, whose heart was pierc'd

With the remembrance of a grievous wrong

Or slow distemper or neglected love,

(And so, poor Wretch! fill'd all things with himself

And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale

Of his own sorrows) he and such as he

First named these notes a melancholy strain;

And many a poet echoes the conceit,

Poet who hath been building up the rhyme (ll. 12-24)

Coleridge's choice of mythic theme, the nightingale, is an odd one in this context. Briefly, the myth of the nightingale is a myth of translation. Philomel is raped by Tereus, and her tongue is cut out so that she cannot reveal the crime. Though she seeks revenge by murdering Tereus, she is punished, transformed into a Nightingale. The song is figured as coding Philomel's testimony, and yet the inscrutability of its form, our inability to decipher her tale, becomes the confounding and seductive interest which sustains the myth through its history – in effect that interest becomes the occasion of an infinite series of translations. Coleridge cites the myth here, however he actively works against its figuration of the endless chain of signification. Coleridge argues that the meaning of the song is only a projection, 'in nature there is nothing melancholy.' Nature here stands for that undifferentiated state in which sign and referent have not yet been split from one another, in which Philomel's song has not yet manifested as the disjuncture between meaning and interpretation, and as a place and time in which that song has yet to be taken up by endless poets who set themselves the task of finding meaning in her warbles only to echo the conceit that her love chaunt is somehow irrevocably lost.

Most recent of these interpreters would have be the Augustan poet, whose overly Latinate and routinized versification are critiqued here as mechanized verse, 'poet who hath been building up the rhyme:' a prosodic architecture upon which fine ornaments and ideas are hung.

Imbedded in the personification of the Augustan poet as allegory for industrial production, is, more specifically, the figure of the industrialization of the literary marketplace. The man who 'fill'd all things with himself' conjures the Malthusian image of rampant overpopulation, sexual, industrial and literary promiscuity. Romantic readers would have recognized this slippage into sociological analysis. They might also have noted that the metaphor describes precisely what was occurring in the literary marketplace with the mass production of broadside ballads. The 'echo' literally echoes the sounds of the machinery of the press as it produces the same text over and over again, setting up an opposition to the poem's initial – though uncomfortable – moments of silence. The 'echo' also suggests a sort of derivative mimesis, a poetry that simply copies and self-etiolates. While the echo is a repetition with a difference, it is also a repetition which diminishes as it continues to reproduce itself. The echo recalls for us that image of the minstrel, literally imagined as joint between past and present, and yet simultaneously disavowed as the figure which produces the echo of the past in the present as a difference, not to mention as the echo of that echo in the form of the mass produced commodity ballad.

Rather, Coleridge wants to suggest that the song of the Nightingale resists signification, that we can conceive of nature and its expressions as undifferentiated stuff. Yet, as we have seen, nature, the minstrel and the ballad, are always already individuated: always already distressed – their natural organicism only fetishized. Coleridge's suggestion in the following lines,

> Nature's sweet voices always full of love
>
> And Joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
>
> That Crowds and hurries, and precipitates

With fast thick warble his delicious notes (ll. 42-45)

only betrays this disinterest. Not only does Coleridge find in nature, and in the song of the

nightingale for that matter, the symbols love and joyance, but he figures those tropes as

interest to be *consumed*. The nightingale's song is 'thick' and 'delicious'. Coleridge here

constructs an eco-centric ideology which effaces its anthropocentric appetite for nature.

The idealization of nature in the poem is not only the displacement of history, it is the

effacement of man at the center of that process of idealization.

Perhaps this is the thinking behind the publication of "The Nightingale" within an

anonymously composed volume of poems. *Anonymous*, though, as the stated author of a

text, instantiates a paradox that is peculiar to thinking about romantic texts within the

antiquarian frame that I have been emphasizing. The term is its own ghostly demarcation,

a claim to authorship through the negation of the presence of an author. However the

negation of that presence is not simply a theoretical one, it would have had an historical

valence in 1798 as well. By 1789 copyright and intellectual property laws that governed

literary production in England had been radically reconceived. In a move that essentially

temporalized literary ownership, a 20 year lifespan was placed on literary property, thus

reversing the legal status of literature as the timeless production of a mythological

authorial figure. What the shift in copyright status did was to allow for multiple editions

of a single text to be produced at once. What it effectively legislated was a new

epistemology of authorship that was no longer capable of negating its economic

commitments through an ideology and of immortality and an imagined aura of

originality.[44] Thus, as 'anonymous' names an absence in theory, it reveals a negation

which must presuppose the concept of an embodied author, *auctor economicus*, unique to

the status literary production in 1798. Coleridge, however, wants nature to be enough to

sustain the poet,

> He had better far have stretch'd his limbs
>
> beside a brook in the mossy forest-dell
>
> By sun or moonlight, to the influxes
>
> Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
>
> Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
>
> And of his fame forgetful! So his fame
>
> Should share in nature's immortality, (ll. 25-31)

and while it may provide an overabundance of influence, the poet who forgets his song,

and his fame, is no longer a poet qua the professional producer of verse. Coleridge wants

to de-legislate the economic commitments of poetic production, and to re-imagine

literature as timeless as nature. We saw the same tension in the notebook entry #620,

where Coleridge fetishizes the ballad mode as that which 'imparts its influence,' thus

securing it from the stain of the text's exchange value. However, the naturalized verse is a

contradiction in terms, an impossible poetic *enterprise*, an always already a corrupted

form, an echo of its former self. The solutions are, as we have seen, paradoxically figured

along the same axes of interest. In fact, the interest of the poem, as it begins to consume

nature, is to produce more and more of it.

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[44] For an extended discussion of the changes in intellectual property laws during the late
18th Century see Andrew Bennett, Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity
(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 1-30

Thus we have the extended flight into the castle, wild with king cups and grass that grow/undermine from within the neat man made structures that are now filled with nightingales disburdening themselves of song. The assonant rhymes of 'trim' and 'king', 'grass' and 'paths' and the internal/slant rhymes of 'up' and cup' create a latticework that weave lines 52 and 53 into one another thus performing the very overgrowing Coleridge describes. Here again, we "might almost forget it was not day," and submit to the seductive fiction of a timeless – 'forget it was not day', like the 'still night', is another figuration which collapses time in upon itself – no place. The retreat continues to sustain itself through a turning away from the material presence of the two auditors in the poem, Dorothy and William Wordsworth, those figures who, in fact, inaugurated the project of *LB* in the first place. As Coleridge narrates the scene of nightingales who swarm the castle (ll. 55-68) he cannot avoid the trope of translation. The poem establishes another formal mode of mediation which it has thematically been working against. Dorothy and William do not hear the love chaunt of the nightingale, they are only the witness to Coleridge's allusion, in a sense, they can only experience the translation of that experience: they are a party to it, not of it; Dorothy and William can only, albeit necessarily, access that song metaphorically. And it is in this final sense that Coleridge has failed to provide the solution to the problem he has so keenly perceived, rather he has committed the double sin of Percy and the Augustan poet. He has idealized the song of nature, and through that idealization of its purity, he has created a structure through which he can only bring that idealized form into being in a presently mediated/transcribed/distressed form. That is, he can only sublimate his fetish of nature into and brassy figural tropes.

The poem's final image is of little consolation. Coleridge wants to offer up Hartley, his primogeniture, as the figure who redeems his inability to produce the naturalized poetry he so desperately seeks to make – a poetry that would collapse referent into referred, signifier into signified, and in so doing deconstruct the binary of reification/commodification,

> My dear babe,
>
> Who, capable of no articulate sound,
>
> Mars all things with his imitative lisp,
>
> How he would place his hand beside his ear,
>
> His little hand, the small forefinger up,
>
> And bid us listen! And I deem it wise
>
> To make him Nature's playmate. He knows well
>
> The evening star: and once he awoke
>
> In most distressful mood (some inward pain
>
> Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream)
>
> I hurried with him to our orchard plot,
>
> And he beholds the moon, and hush'd at once
>
> Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
>
> While his fair eyes that swam with undropt tears
>
> Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! Well –
>
> It is a father's tale (ll. 91-106)

Coleridge offers up Hartley as the child of nature who should realize Coleridge's own efforts to produce poetry which resists the forms of economic subsumption and the

historical movements of totalization which in turn bring that process into reified form.

The gesture towards the future functions to negate the fetishized past which Coleridge has

all the while been struggling to instrumentalize for poetic purposes. However, the final

procedure only achieves its overcoming of the strictures of the past ironically. Coleridge

not only offers up Hartley as a sort of sacrifice to an oracle of the future, but indicates that

the poem, 'it is a father's tale,' has also been an act of begetting. In effect the production

of a new 'tale' (a new form of ballad, a lyrical ballad) only comes at the expense of the

poem's failure to produce that tale within the space of its own argument. The poem's

narrative of resistance to the processes of literalization can only intimate, by way of its

ironic final movement, a vision of futurity which exceeds its mark.

Let me return to the signature that I began the chapter with. While "The

Nighitngale" conceives of its production along the narrative lines I sketched out for the

case of ballad revivalism – which can be represented by the following schematic:

transcription/fetishization → reification/commodification

 the poem's final movement, to which Coleridge's phonemic signature is appended, offers

a glimpse at a deconstruction of the logocentric thinking which governs that narrative. So

while after Derrida we rarely consider poetry as a belated exercise, i.e. one in which a text

functions as a reliquary for meaning, where composition begins as, and can only trace, a

fading coal of inspiration, and where written language is merely the derivative of a pre-

existing oral form of communication, in other words, a mere *transcription*; and while we

routinely credit *LB* as a self-conscious experiment in a new kind of versification; the full

scale production of a linguistic system in which to hear is to understand, where language

is refashioned as an enactive network of graphonic relations, is a moment, however, which

"The Nightingale" can only imagine outside the space of its rhetorical economy, and occasionally produce unwittingly. Coleridge's phonemic signature, as such, indexes this distance through its true performance of a post-structural poetics, a poetics of inscription which Coleridge has been straining to write.

CHAPTER 2

Oratory in The Bristol Lectures,
And Rhetoric in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison"

I

"Have you ever heard me preach, Charles?" "N-n-never heard you d-d-do anything else,
C-c-coleridge." *TT*

I begin with a fragment of a conversation between Coleridge and Charles Lamb

for two reasons. First, the instance rehearses a principal concern of my first chapter, the

voice in/of the text – it does this through the phonetic textualization of Lamb's timorous

stutter. And second, the same instance demonstrates, from the point of view of the

auditor, the ironic structure of conversation that I will be working through in this chapter,

that is, the lecture as conversational mode. The above quotation is of course exaggerated

to comical effect by Lamb, who is our source in this case. But the imperious pause

implied by the comma which separates Coleridge's question, 'have you ever heard me

preach?' from the subject to whom that question addresses itself, 'Charles,' and the

hesitant rejoinder 'N-n-never…C-c-coleridge' signal something more than the outsizing

methods of parody. I want to take this inflation seriously, because I think it suggests a

certain uncomfortable truth about the nature of Coleridgean conversation that must

disguise itself in the form of a joke to make its point: Coleridge doesn't converse, he

preaches. Or rather, we might consider that the roots of the word 'conversation' are from

the Latin 'con' and 'verso' 'with' and 'to turn against:' roots that focus precisely a

picture of the interlocutor's 'turning away' from the occasion of conversation back in

upon the self. I will trace this movement through the two conversational situations I

propose in this chapter: Coleridge's 1795 Bristol Lectures on politics which performs the move oratorically, and Coleridge's conversation poem, "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison," which reproduces the 'turning away' rhetorically. 'Con' and 'verso,' as I will suggest, form produce a tension which threatens to undo the idea of conversation as the mutual communication between auditor and interlocutor.

Let me briefly lay out some of the critical stakes of this chapter. I would refer the reader back to my introduction, where I traced the discursive formation of the 'conversation poems' as a canonical set. However, let me restate here that "Lime-Tree" has only been a conversation poem for the last 80 years. If we are to continue to apply this term, as a productive way of grouping "Lime-Tree" along side "The Nightingale" – through anthologization, pedagogical praxis, and scholarly inquiry – then we should address some of its conversational aspects.

To this end, my own reading intervenes in a small discourse of the generic qualities of the conversation poems, by re-situating "Lime-Tree" within the 'conversational context' of the 1795 Bristol Lectures.

Kelvin Everest has argued that we must consider the production of the conversation poems as necessitated by an audience, that is, by the particular audience for which Coleridge rehearses what he imagines will be sympathetic concerns. Everest reads the changes Coleridge makes to a poem like "France, An Ode," which is first composed in 1793 and then published for the first time in 1798, as a kind of a revisionary poetics motivated by Coleridge's need to feel the sympathy of his readership.[45]   Between the

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[45] This skepticism, by 1793, would have already marked a decline in Coleridge's radical Jaconbinism, a commitment most explicitly professed in the 1789 poem, *Destruction of the Bastille*, composed as an undergraduate at Cambridge. The poem is one of the

initial date of the poem's composition and its publication in the *Morning Chronicle*, the

democratic ideals of the French revolution had given way to a full-blown imperialism,

with campaigns carried out against Italy and England itself. Coleridge refigures his

enthusiasm for France's declaration of war in 1793 into a full-scale reproof of French

politics, thus producing an ode that reads more like an elegy. The changes, Everest

argues, pander to a specific political audience, the *Chronicle's* readership, which by 1798

would have labeled even French associations as treason.[46] For Everest, the revision of

the politics in "France, An Ode" is motivated by a larger psychodynamics of friendship.

The ostensible figures of address reveal Coleridge's unconscious efforts to stage for

himself a sympathetic audience, "the concern with family and friendship in Coleridge's

poetry follows an ascending and then receding movement…[in] creative confidence of

happy marriage and friendly community…the conversation poems are the highest point

of the ascending movement."(Everest 46) The sympathetic operation, Everest argues,

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clearest accounts of Coleridge's commitment to the Revolution, one which no doubt
prompted Southey to later recall, "If he was not a Jacobine, in the common acceptation of
the name, I wonder who the devil was." New Letters of Robert Southey, ed. Kenneth
Curry 2 vols. (New York: Columbia UP, 1965), vol. I 511 However, any suggestion of
actual, categorical political definition when speaking about Coleridge, particularly when
talking about the span of his years at Cambridge to his return from Germany in 1804,
needs to be qualified. Coleridge's history of revising his own politics, i.e. a history of
pandering to the political audience he happens to be addressing, makes it difficult to pin
him down during any given period. For a sustained discussion of the conflicts
surrounding Coleridge's Jacobinism as a categorical label, and his evasion, even
suppression of that title in later years, see Nicholas Roe Wordsworth and Coleridge the
Radical Years (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 91-148

[46] Following the arguments made by Paul Magnuson in *Reading Public Romanticism* it is
important to consider the public discourse (and in this case the political discourse) a
poem enters through the act and site of publication. To this end, it should be noted that
The morning Chronicle was, in 1798, an organ for the Whig party and a forum which
stands in contradistinction to Coleridge's self-produced, non-aligned, dissentious forums
for publication such as *The Watchman*, in which he had published an entire series of
political essays and articles.

pivots around memories of abandonment and isolation. Everest's source is Coleridge's

earliest correspondence with his family. The letters, written in adolescence at *Christ*

Hospital and addressed primarily to his mother and brother George, foreground

Coleridge's growing isolation, sense of abandonment, and a general feeling of being

unloved. The poetry's domestic, familial and intimate register grow, on Everest's,

account out of a need to revise the trauma of Coleridge's early years.[47] And yet the most

compelling implications of the poetry's 'conversation' qua a theatrical performativity,

and the relationship between poet and audience as an embodied oratorical one, are set

aside to consider the thematic of sympathy.

The sympathetic register is also the subject of Lucy Newlyn's reading of the

conversation poems. She suggests that Coleridge is able to sure up his hermeneutical

enterprise by addressing himself to certain familiar auditors who simultaneously serve as

ideal readers; and Tilotama Rajan makes a similar argument for a so-called hermeneutics

of sympathy where each auditor functions as a supplement to the poem.[48] Sarah

Coleridge (then Fricker) in *Eolian Harp*, Sarah Hutchinson in *Dejection*, Hartley

Coleridge in *Frost at Midnight* and Charles Lamb in *This Lime Tree Bower My Prison*

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[47] Thomas Mcfarland makes a similar case for the poetry in his chapter "Coleridge's
Anxiety" in <u>Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Modalities
of Fragmentation</u> (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981) Mcfarland also notes that Coleridge's
autobiographical letters, commissioned by Tom Poole in 1801, make no mention of the
severe anxiety so manifest in the letters of the period they recount. Indeed the
autobiographical letters perform the palliative revisionism that motivates the body poetry
which Everest addresses.

[48] Tilotama Rajan, <u>The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic
Theory and Practice</u> (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 15-35 and 101-135 Rajan's account is,
however, deconstructive; in so much as she assumes that the conversation poem's
sympathetic operation is only initiates a completed through the supplement which the text
necessitates. Also see her earlier account of Coleridge's lyric poetry in Rajan, <u>Dark
Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism</u> (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 204-259

constitute the select coterie of addressees (though I would call them *listeners*) who, as

Rajan suggests and Newlyn confirms, "create[s] the possibility of intimate unity between

speaker and listener."[49] The extent to which Coleridge is able to script a sympathetic

response, is the extent, on Everest's, Newlyn's, and Rajan's accounts, to which the poem

is successful in achieving its ideal of conversation – what each identifies as an economy

of intimate union. I argue, however, that this union can only be achieved through a

fetishistic operation.

My use of the fetish however, departs from its more standard usage to denote an

object cathected with particular and perverse power. Rather I employ the fetish here as a

structure of 'turning away' and 'subject formation.' Before moving into the picture of

conversation as 'turning away' in the lectures, and in the poetry, let me begin with Freud,

who elucidates a theoretical structure of the fetish upon which I build my own definition.

Freud argues that the fetish is a sexual perversion developed by the child who is

unable to overcome the initial trauma of castration anxiety.[50] The account is uniquely

visual: the child, upon first *seeing* his mother as lack, glances awry from the imagined

site of castration – the mother's vagina. The turn is motivated by the subject's own fear

of castration, and the anxiety cathected into the first object upon which the child's gaze

happens to alight. The object of the gaze, becomes, in the moment of psychological

bildung, the fetish object. The lack, figured as the negative space of representation and as

such as a symbol of castration, is something which needs to be layered over by the

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[49] Lucy Newlyn, <u>Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception</u> (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 73

[50] For Freud's discussion of fetishism and its origins see Sigmund Freud, <u>Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works</u> ed. J. Stacey 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953 –), vol. XXI 152-157

positive image of a substitute phallus – the fetish object. The fetish object simultaneously confirms the subjects own potency through this process of layering over – or filling a void – and structures the subject's disavowal of its use of the fetish object to achieve consumation, a disavowal which can be glossed by the phrase 'I know this is a penis, but never the less'. The fetish is a double and simultaneous process. It is a structure of manipulation and of the disavowal of that very act of manipulation. It is an operation, in which consummation is always predicated upon self-reference, upon the negation of the object in the formation of the subject. It is my contention that the consummation of that intimate register in the poetry is only achieved through a similar dynamic of loss signified, and loss disavowed, loss negated. However, I want to emphasize that the poem's economy of intimacy still bears the trace of the original distance and the loss it sought to negate.

Conversation, and likewise, to converse would have meant, by the 1790's as the Oxford English Dictionary makes clear, "sexual intercourse or intimacy."[51] Indeed we don't need to look to the philological history of the word 'conversation' to find its troping of intercourse in the 18th century. Thomas Sheridan's *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language*, a treatise on the properly perfromative practices of oratory, and a *seminal* text of the British Elocutionary movement produces the context for us.[52] Sheridan argues,

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[51] "*conversation*, n." The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 15, 2009 <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/ 78649785>.
[52] cf. John Walker, Elements of Elocution 2 vols. (London, 1781) and A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English language: To Which Are Prefixed Principles of English pronunciation, Third edition (Dublin, 1798), Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale, University of Michigan, 15 Mar. 2009; John Herries, The Elements of Speech, (London, 1773), Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale.

True eloquence does not wait for cool approbation. Like irresistible beauty, it transports, it ravishes, it commands the admiration of all, who are within its reach. If it allows time to criticize, it is not genuine. It ought to hurry us out of ourselves, to enlarge and swallow up our whole attention; to drive everything out of our minds, besides the subject it would hold forth, and the point it wants to carry. The hearer finds himself as unable to resist it, as to blow out a conflagration with the breath of his mouth, or to stop the stream of his river with his hand. His passions are no longer his own. The orator has taken possession of them: and with superior power, works them to whatever he pleases.[53]

It is telling that the importance of the content of the discourse, here in Sheridan's sentence as well as in the generalized performative moment he sketches, is subordinated to the purely formal and sublime aspects of the oratory. The sexual connotations are fairly blunt as well. The experience Sheridan describes is clearly one of arousal and of a kind of rhetorical consummation. The consummation Sheridan depicts is, however, a 'ravishing', one which transports and forcibly manipulates the reaction of its audience, in effect, one which only achieves its consummation (that transport) through an oratorical dynamic or structure of domination and disavowal. The original loss signified, which is fittingly not present to the passage, is the fear that communication might break-down, that the auditor might not understand the point which the interlocutor is trying to get

University of Michigan. 15 Mar. 2009 and John Herries, <u>The Elements of Speech</u> (London, 1773); <u>The Art of Conversation; or Polite Entertainer. Calculated for the Improvement of Both Sexes,</u> By a Nobleman of Distinguished Abilities, The second edition. London, 1758. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of Michigan. 15 Mar. 2009
[53] Thomas Sheridan, <u>A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language</u> (Dublin, 1781), 210-211

across. Thus the task taken on by the orator is not one of creating a kind of mutual understanding, but rather of forcing that understanding, 'true eloquence does not wait for cool approbation…it commands the admiration of all.'

The movements of the orator (in this context meaning both the deportmental and the discursive) are seductive: they draw in the auditor, 'enlarge and swallow up our whole attention.' The beauty of the speech, its formal perfection and irresistibility work to conceal its overtaking of the auditor to which it is addressed, and to overcome that imagined communicative break-down. There remains, however, a latent tension between Sheridan's emphasis on the irresistibility of the oratorical performance and the metaphor's of subjugation that he uses to describe the overwhelming and consequently unselving experience of the auditor. Sheridan *likens* the speech of the orator to a raging conflagration and an endless stream. The auditor, dominated by these characteristic metaphors for the aesthetic category of the sublime, only mounts a kind of futile, bodily resistance; 'the breath of his mouth' ('his' is not a slip, but rather an indication of the particularly masculinized account Sheridan offers: both of the interlocutor and, perhaps surprisingly, of the auditor) and 'his hand' are no match for the sheer force of the performance – though we might remember that the discoursing is also carried on the breath of the speaker.[54] The futility of resistance is, however, figured as 'irresistible beauty,' and as such, paradoxically, the auditor willingly submits to his domination. The metaphor of the beautiful which begins the passage thus formally instantiates a rhetorical concealment of the more violent/domineering metaphors of the sublime that follow. In

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[54] For a discussion of the representation of the 'sublime' in 18th and 19th Century in discourses of the aesthetic and elocution see Peter de Bolla, The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 27-102

psycho-dynamical terms, the passage constructs a sadomasochistic relationship between interlocutor and auditor, however, that dynamic breaks down when the agency – presupposed of both parties in that kind of relationship – is absented in the auditor's case. In short, rather than the old infinitely reductive complex of sadomasochism (glossed by an inversion of the joke 'the masochist says to the sadist hit me and the sadist says no') we can see the operations of the conversational fetish at work performed here in the microcosm of the particular passage from *A Grammar*, and, by way of an ironic distance, we can observe the structure of disavowal which governs the larger, macrocosmic system of elocution as it is mapped by Sheridan. The oratorical performance stages its mode of transport (its domination) as the disavowal of that domination by insisting upon the irresistible, seductive beauty of discourse – the auditor cannot truly be ravished (raped) if he has submitted to that domination.

Everest's, Newlyn's and Rajan's readings of the conversation poems, without making mention of the particular sexual freight the term conversation certainly had accrued, argue that the relative success of the 'conversation poems' also lie in their ability to consummate a poetic ideal, to produce as it were, an intimate rhetorical union. The mechanics of sympathy, the imaginative capacity for feeling in the place of an *other*, makes possible the overcoming of the dialectical difference the poems establish between auditor and interlocutor. In their accounts, however, the absence of the historical currency that conversation – figured here as *intercourse* – would have carried, provides a fresh opportunity to reframe some of the rhetorical operations of the poetry (in my case "Lime-Tree").

My approach here is a kind of historically grounded psychodynamics of the conversational fetish, wherein the consummation of the poetry's intimate register is only achieved through a structure of disavowal and domination. I have laid out the schematic of elocution here so as to trace its particular operation in the 1795 Lectures, and to identify its reproduction within "Lime-Tree."

II

The Bristol lectures were the first of a number of public roles Coleridge would occupy, roles which I would argue formalize an instance of self-conscious performance. The lectures, held in 1795, are also only the first in what would be an entire series of lectures delivered during Coleridge's lifetime. By 1808 Coleridge had lectured on Shakespeare, Milton, the history of English poetry and range of literary topics. By 1819 he had delivered a program of fourteen lectures on the history of philosophy to the Royal Society in London. The lectures delivered between 1808 and 1819 exemplify a later period in Coleridge's political life marked by a *radical* swing from left to right. It was a swing that would lead Coleridge to embrace, as Marilyn Butler has suggested, the title of *man of letters* – the logical extension of his earlier occasional self posturing in the role of public genius.[55] What separates the Bristol Lectures from the later series of 1808 and 1819 – apart from their explicit defense of high culture and their orientation towards an

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[55] See Marilyn Butler Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760 – 1830 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 69-93. For an examination of Coleridge's participation in high literary and cultural debates during the 1820's see Robert Keith Lapp, Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge and the Distresses of the Regency (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990), 67-86

elite to the exclusion of any lay audience – is that the lectures of 1795 are professedly political.[56] Rather than seek to disguise the politics implied by a series of defenses, the Bristol Lectures are conceived, from the outset, as a series of discussions on topical issues ranging from the French Revolution to the English slave trade. And, it is in this sense that my reading of the lectures as a turning away from the occasion of their performance, and likewise as a turning away from the manuscript of the lecture itself, is inextricable from what I will call the historical site of their delivery.

The historical site, as I will define it here, is a threefold space.[57] By this I mean it is a geographic or topographical space; it is also a mental space, or the space of an epistemological faculty which understands and interprets that material space; and last it is a social space, a space of various practices and ideologies. The historical site, as such, is the trilectical field of interplay between these three concepts, a space in which all three features mutually constitute one another, and inform my account of the lectures.

Coleridge certainly would have been aware of the last dimension of Bristolian space, the discourses of English radicalism and dissent during the 1790's that the lectures

[56]Indeed the lectures given in 1809 and 1819 that I mentioned were conceived as an act of recuperation, as a re-enshrinement of Shakespeare and Milton whose status as cultural capital had been in decline during the early part of the 19th C. For a discussion of this impulse in the Shakespeare lectures, but as a source whose insight might be applied to the entire series as a construction of a group of *monuments* see Bruce Haley, Living Forms: Romantics and the Monumental Figure (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 59-82; also, see the prospectus to the 1818 lectures for its invective against indiscriminant / promiscuous reading as one of the possible causes of moral insufficiency in England and the need to resurrect certain moral monuments S.T. Coleridge, Lectures 1808 – 1819: On Literature, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2 vols., (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987)
[57]In this respect my usage is indebted to the introductory gesture of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, which foregrounds the idea of, physical, mental and social spaces. See Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1-15

enter into, given his association with several of the prominent figures in that broad political climate.

Bristol was a hotbed of political action during the late 1790's. Located on the River Avon, a major channel which leads into the mouth of Severn, it was a port city of considerable economic importance, and a city that figured prominently in the British slave trade. Its harbor was the launch site of some thousands of slave ships from the early 18th century until the abolition of slavery in England in 1833. The geo-political situation of Bristol drew a number of radical figures. The Abolitionist Thomas Clarkson had taken up residence there and outspoken Unitarian ministers Joseph Priestly and Richard Price had undertaken a number of lectures in the city.[58] Fellow Unitarian and dissenting preacher John Prior Estlin was also occupying the pulpit during that time in Bristol.[59] So was the poet, radical activist and language reformer John Thelwall. Priestly, Price and Estlin were masters of the sermon, a genre of public speaking which addressed itself to both Christian and secular audiences, while Thelwall was largely responsible for popularizing the genre of the political lecture, his own audiences often numbering well into the hundreds.[60]

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[58] Coleridge and Southey had planned to invite Dr. Priestly to join them in their Pantisocratic scheme, see *CL* I:15

[59] Estlin would also fund part of six lectures series on 'Revealed Religion, its Corruptions and Political Views" that Coleridge delivered in Bristol late in 1795.

[60] This twofold address of Estlin, Priestly and Price would serve as a model for Coleridge's own *Lectures on Revealed Religion*, delivered late in 1795 and framed by the following prospectus, "intended for two classes of men – Christians and infidels / to the former, that they may be able to give a reason for the hope that it is in them – to the latter that they may not determine against Christianity from arguments applicable to its' Corruptions only." *Lectures* 38. For a discussion of Coleridge's involvement with Thelwall, and for a discussion of Thelwall's own radical activity and theories of language reform see Judith Thompson, "An Autumnal Blast a Killing Frost: Coleridge's Poetical Conversations With John Thelwall," Studies in Romanticism 36 (Fall 1997): 427-456

Coleridge's foray into the public field of radical politics in the Bristol lectures is, I think, inextricable from these larger domains. We will see that the 'turning away' I will map in the lectures is motivated by these discourses which signify uncomfortably for Coleridge. However, those broad political valences are also underwritten by the personal social dynamics that brought Coleridge to Bristol in the first place.

Coleridge came to Bristol in 1795 at the request of Robert Southey to deliver a course of lectures designed to fund their pantisocratic project. The two, along with Robert Lovell and George Burnett had devised that scheme during the summer of 1794. The plan was to sail to America to establish a utopian colony in Pennsylvania on the banks of Susquehanna River. The voyage and startup costs would be funded via the subscription publication of Southey's *Joan of Arc* and Coleridge's *Imitations of the Modern Latin Poets* and additional funding would be provided by a series of lectures each would deliver in Bristol: Southey on history and Coleridge on politics and religion. The small communitarian project of pantisocracy would abolish private property and subsist upon the shared work of agricultural production. Burnett, Lovell, and Southey had each secured spouses so as to make their domestic ideal *reproducible*, leaving Coleridge to find a fourth spouse to complete the quartet of couples. Southey et al. were engaged to the Fricker sisters – Mary, Edith and Martha – and Coleridge had nominally agreed to the fourth Fricker in the frenetic birth of the entire scheme, "what and how important events have been evolved! America! Southey! Miss Fricker!" (*CL* I:59) Yet Coleridge could not fully commit himself to Sarah. Indeed he held out hope for the "ideal standard of female Excellence," (*CL* I:77) Mary Evans, a fellow student at Cambridge and conversationalist of matching wits. (*CL* I:25)

The affair however, was brief and not to last. By December 24th Evans had refused Coleridge and had married another, and Southey was pressuring Coleridge to honor his engagement to Sarah and his commitment to Pantisocracy. In a letter to Evans which marks the last of their correspondence and the termination of their relationship Coleridge writes, "To love you Habit has made unalterable. This passion however, divested as it now is, of all Shadow of Hope, will loose its disquieting power." (*CL* I:76) The letter figures Coleridge's love for Mary as a perpetual commitment, one which, in spite of the tumult of their abrupt split and the waning of his passion in her absence, habit of mind will not, indeed cannot, let go. Coleridge seems to be performing a devotional strain here, where, in the absence of appetitive passions, the intellectual love for Mary simply will not die. The first sentence of the passage declares that undying love, the next sentence effaces it. Four days later, in a letter to Southey, Coleridge would interpolate the same quotation within the following,

> To marry a woman whom I do not love – to degrade her, whom I call my
>
> Wife, by making her the Instrument of low Desire – and on the removal of
>
> a desulatory Appetite, to be perhaps not displeased with her Absence! –
>
> Enough! – These Refinements are the wildering Fires, that lead me into
>
> Vice. Mark you, Southey! – *I will do my Duty*. (*CL* I:77)

Coleridge's quotation of himself, within the context of the letter to Southey reveals, perhaps even more than it does in the letter to Mary herself, his inability to move past his devotion and to commit himself fully to Sarah. The instance of self-plagiarism also reveals a certain devotion to the poetical beauty of the line itself – something which Coleridge also cannot seem to let go of. Indeed the opposition is quite stark. Coleridge's

love for Mary is something eternal, spiritual, fading into shadow, but nonetheless a presence which hangs over him; his feelings for Sarah, the mere 'instrument of low desire' a fleeting, appetitive and corporealized impulse.

It is in this context that Coleridge enters into Bristol. We can, through a simple inter-textual map, see how Coleridge's devotion traces itself through his discourse. The letter closes with the splenetic confirmation that Coleridge will 'do his duty,' that is, deliver the course of lectures and uphold his previous commitment to Pantisocracy, though the entire project of the letter is in effect to make it clear at what cost Coleridge will suffer to uphold his end of the bargain. Indeed 'duty' here emphasizes both the labor involved, and the funds that labor is intended to produce.

It is precisely this context of reluctance that frames the operations of the conversational fetish in political lectures of 1795. The lectures, three in total, were delivered in the school-room above the corn market in Bristol.[61] The first lecture, "A Moral and Political Lecture" (hereafter referred to as *MPL*) revised and published in December of 1795 as the introductory sermon to *Consciones ad Poplum*, begins with the image of ships in harbor, "When the wind is fair and the Planks of the Vessel sound, we may trust everything to the management of professional Mariners."(*Lectures* 4) The image is a metaphor for the operations of government, which, as Coleridge indicates, might function in the hands of professionals during periods of calm. Coleridge goes on to propose, however, the tumult of the current situation, the impositions of wig powder taxes, the parliamentary/Pittite plot against Bristol's own citizens, and the incarceration of various dissenting figures – Thelwall included. The solution, which Coleridge

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[61] see editors introduction, *Lectures* xxviii

provides to the uprooting power of the storm he conjures throughout, refers back to that original metaphor of the government as ship in the harbor. Coleridge's proposes, as the solution to the contemporary political turbulence, "the necessity of bottoming on fixed principles" (*Lectures* 5)

The picture of ships in harbor, which structures the remaining argument of the lecture, is a fitting one for a discourse delivered from the school room above the corn market. As contemporary maps confirm, the harbor which held so many of those monstrous slave ships, was very much visible from the room in which Coleridge was lecturing. **(Figures 1 and 2)** Thus we might infer the iconographic significance of the Bristol harbor, its ability to inscribe itself in the text, either through addition, or original composition, through its visual presence (the physical/material dimension of Bristolian space), or its presence in that mental dimension of the space which also constitutes the historical site.[62]

The solution Coleridge provides to the tempest of political turmoil in Bristol, his idea of 'Bottoming on fixed principles,' is both an appeal to the factions of dissent to resist the temptation towards anarchy, which Coleridge saw as undermining the entire effort of Robespierre and the French, and an image that suggests dropping anchor and the themes of domesticity and retirement.

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[62] Because the earliest extant manuscript is the December text of *MPL* published as the first lecture in *Consciones ad Poplum* we do not know which dimension the ship metaphor belongs to, that is, we cannot know whether Coleridge included the framing piece in the composition of his lecture manuscript, or if he inserted the frame – as a quotation of ad libidium oratory – upon redrafting the lecture for publication. However, the distinction is not important, as both forms of inscription would have been effects of Bristol as historical site.

The monstrous ships in the harbor would have no doubt signaled the uncomfortable political discourses of slavery and parliamentary corruption surrounding Bristol. They would have also signified the social commitments that beget the lecture series itself, that is, they are not only a metaphor which organizes the lecture's general appeal to fixed anchorage as a retreat from the tumult of political life into the tranquility of domestic retirement, but also one that signifies the particular pantisocratic pretext of the lectures, the voyage to America, Coleridge's own failed love, his reluctant promise to "do his duty." In a sense, the metaphor which figures as the solution to the turmoil of the current political crisis, is also a metaphor which inscribes itself visibly within the text of the lectures as the losses that beget the project in the first place.

The text of the letters I cited earlier and the text of the lectures confirm the processes through which those losses materialize and signify. The process of turning away from that site of loss, the site of Bristol, I will argue is performed by the formal procedures of the lectures themselves, as Coleridge and others have described their mode of delivery.

The genre of public political lecture, for Coleridge, permitted an immediacy of speech that distinguished it from pure textual copmosition. Coleridge would recount that he composed the manuscript for the first lecture, "at one sitting between the hours of twelve at night and the Breakfast Time of the day, on which it was to be delivered."[63] Indeed the description of the act of composition offered here dramatizes an effusive impulse: produced in one sitting, in sleep deprived hours, as near as possible to the moment of delivery, writing aspires to the conditions of speech. The very act of

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[63] Here, in a letter to George Dyer, Coleridge refers to the composition of *MPL* (*CL* I:152)

composition is figured as an effort to escape both its own textuality, and by extension, the very reasons for Coleridge's whole lecture series. It is a description of a process of composition which tries desperately to escape its production.

If the script itself lays claim to extemporaneity, a recession into the freedom of a subjectivity not committed to disagreeable external or historical facts, but which, nonetheless, cannot help but incorporate those facts into the text, then what of its actual delivery? Coleridge characterized his mode of lecturing in the 1795 addresses as "an ebullient Fancy, a flowing Utterance, a light & dancing heart, & a disposition to catch fire by the very rapidity of my own motion, & to speak vehemently from mere verbal associations ... "[64] The exaggeration is typically Coleridgean, performing the very light, dancing and flowing utterance it describes. Nonetheless, we get the same figuration of freedom that Coleridge highlighted in the scene of composition, a freedom which is the distinct privilege of speech. It is also a freedom accorded by the conventions and conditions of a lecture, in which the verbal reverie Coleridge describes here could – indeed as a matter of course must – proceed unchecked. Coleridge's description is of a language that is entirely self-motivated, motivated in this sense meaning literally driven by the "rapidity of [his] own motion," into "mere verbal associations." And, as the *Critical Review* in April of 1795 stated,

> This little composition is the production of a young man who possesses a
> poetical imagination. It is spirited…Though our young political lecturer

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[64] *CL* II:1000

leaves his auditors abruptly. We confess we were looking for something

further, and little thought that we were actually come to the *finis*.[65]

It is a text which both does and does not argue a point. Coleridge and the reviewer stress

that the lecture functions as a consummate performance of its own spontaneity. And yet,

as we have seen, the organizing structure of disavowal still bears the inscriptions of the

losses it seeks to negate through that ex-temporization. Namely, the lectures betray a

desire for retirement from the current tumult of political activity which is their very

occasion, and more acutely, they trace a retreat from the pantisocratic pretexts of the

lectures themselves, the loss of Mary and the reluctance to enter Bristol to begin with.

Indeed the structure of disavowal is twofold in the conversational fetishish as it

operates in the lecture. We can see their *look awry* – which is also a turning inward – in a

disavowal of the initial loss signified by the cathected topography of Bristol. And we can

see the disavowal of the text itself: the composition in manuscript is dramatized as a

moment of writing as resistance to writing, and the lectures are themselves a performance

of Coleridge's resistance to the text and context of the lectures.[66] Ex-temporizing is

Coleridge's preferred term for his mode of lecturing, however, we can *see* that the

performance of spontaneity is motivated by very real historical presences. The emphasis

upon the pure monologism of the lecture mode, and of the performance of the kind of

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[65] The Critical Review or The Annals of Literature 144 vols. (1756-1817), XIII. (April 1795), 455. The references here seem to be both to the delivery of the lecture and to *MPL* in *Consciones*, given that the text may have even been circulating in pamphlet or other by April, and probably immediately after its delivery. The intimation of both "composition" and "auditor[s]" make this double referent clear. It becomes almost impossible to recover an actual response to the delivery of the lectures themselves when accounts obscure – nearly seamlessly, as in the above passage where the reviewer moves between the oral and textual lives of *MPL* – any distinction in the reception of either.

eloquence described by Sheridan in *A Grammar* is one that attempts to reconfirm the potency of the orator through his mastery over the conversational situation, the flowing utterance of his talk subordinating the role of auditor / attendant to a mere signifier in that discourse – something like a mute respondent who functions merely to enable the oratory. And yet, in the disavowal of that primary externality, the lectures are precisely what Lamb's initial joke indicated, and what Coleridge's own exaggerations efface through a textual and oratorical performance of 'the mere rapidity of his own motions,' preaching as conversing.

III

The date of composition for "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" is not known precisely. The earliest extant version is a 55-line truncation interpolated in a letter to Robert Southey dated July 17 1797.[67] The poem appears without a title or explicit prefatory note, rather it is inserted into a matrix of social relations that is the letter. Thus having touted the great deal he received on a house for Wordsworth, just four miles from his own cottage at Nether Stowey, Coleridge says,

> Wordsworth is a very great man – the only man, to whom *at all times & in*
>
> *all modes of excellence* I feel myself inferior – the only one, I mean,

[67] Jack Stillinger, <u>Coleridge and Textual Instability : The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems</u>, (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 43-51. While we cannot identify an exact date of composition, if we take the facts of Coleridge's July 17th letter to Sotuhey to be correct, then Lamb would left Nether Stowey on the previous Friday, the 14th. Lamb would have been with Coleridge for a week by the time he left, so we can assume that Lamb had arrived by the 7th, and that the poem, then, was composed on any of the evening's between the 7th and the 14th.

whom I *have yet met with* – for the London Literati appear to me to be very much like little potatoes – i.e. *no great Things*! – a compost of Nullity & Dullity – Charles Lamb has been with me for a week – he left me Friday morning. – The second day after Wordsworth came to me, dear Sarah accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which confined me during the whole time of C. Lamb's stay & still prevents me from all *walks* longer than a furlong. – While Wordsworth, his Sister, & C. Lamb were out one evening; / sitting in the arbour   of T. Pooles garden, which communicates with mine, I wrote these lines, with   which   I   am pleased. (emphasis in the original) (*CL* I:197)

What follows is a recognizable fragment of "Lime-Tree." I quote at length from the letter because I think that its associative logic can help to frame the operation of the conversational fetish within the published 1800 text of the poem.[68] The letter betrays certain of Coleridge's antipathies towards Southey, those which, as I have suggested, might have begun to develop during their years in Bristol – though I am more interested here in the rhetorical operations of these antipathies than in their psychological determination. Coleridge begins by proclaiming Wordsworth to be the greatest man he has met, indeed the only man to whom he feels inferior. The slight is more than implied, it registers clearly in the grammar, or the thinking through of the letter. Coleridge pauses for three stops, one full and two halves in the proclamation: "to whom I feel my self inferior – (pause) the only one, (half pause) I mean, (half pause) whom I *have yet met with*." The pauses dangle a retraction over their edges; indeed in their withholding they

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[68] I use the 1800 edition from the Annual Review in the reading which follows. All line references are to that text as it is reproduced in *PW* I:156

create the possibility of a brief space in which Coleridge might make amends for the impropriety of his statement, a space in which to redress Southey as it were. But rather than make good on this prospect, Coleridge presses further, 'I mean, whom I *have yet met with*.' The letter is of course a formal occasion of address to Southey, and yet it is precisely a letter that displaces Southey from the picture entirely. The letter is merely, to borrow Stanley Fish's phrase, a discourse agreement,[69] a platform that legitimizes Coleridge's engagement of his own poetic anxieties.

What might be construed as a gesture of humility towards Wordsworth in another context, can only be read here as a means of establishing the motivation for and celebration of Coleridge's own verse performance that is to follow. Wordsworth is the only man to whom Coleridge feels himself inferior – though the possibility of another filling this position is left open by the construction of the present perfect tense. Yet what follows is a negation of the London literati "small potatoes, i.e. no great things" and by associative extension Charles Lamb – the slide from a "compost of Nullity and Dullity" is perhaps a revealing one. Lamb certainly would have counted among those whom Coleridge names the London Literati and had come from London that week to visit – thus we might find a historical valence for the syntactic linkage. Indeed the performance of the poem within the letter, "these lines, with which I am pleased," which Coleridge hypotactically pits against his assertion of Wordsworth's own poetic prowess, "modes of excellence," is prefaced by a negation of its conditions of composition and address. The

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[69] For Fish's discussion of discourse agreements, which for him, sets up a relationship between reader and text wherein the reader is interpellated into the text's fictionality which maintains its priority through the structures of an interpretive community, see his chapter on "How to Do Things With Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism" in Stanley Fish, <u>Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities</u> (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), 197-245

framing piece is further complicated by the *advertisement* that precedes the poem as published in its entirety in the 1800 edition of the *Annual Anthology*.

> *In the June of 1797, some long-expected Friends paid a visit to the Author's Cottage; and on the morning of their arrival he met with an accident, which disabled him from walking during the whole time of their stay. One evening, when they had left him for a few hours, he composed the following lines, in the Garden Bower.* (*PW* I:156)

Here the various uncomfortable conditions of the poem's production – the self-satisfactory prefatory remark etc. – have all been more or less condensed into a generalized picture of composition, yet they remain the motivations of the poem, concealed now by omissions or effasive slips of memory.

Having framed the occasion of the poem as negating its ostensible figures of address, let me turn to the text itself. It is possible, as Jean-Pierre Mileur has done, to read the poem as a process of overcoming the disjuncture that physically separates Coleridge from his would be auditors through the act of bestowal.[70] As the advertisement and the opening stanza depict, Coleridge begins in the bower, isolated, his friends out enjoying a summer evening's hike. Thus while Coleridge acknowledges the impossibility of conversation in the moment, he advances instead, a form of spiritual communication which, quite literally transcends the scenic divide. Mileur's bestowal reading suggests that Coleridge offers his friends – the figure of direct address being Lamb: William and Dorothy Wordsworth are condensed into 'friends', the nameless figures of discourse which legitimate the ostensible gesture towards a plurality of consolation – a shared

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[70] See Jean-Pierre Mileur, <u>Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 34-60.

subjective experience, the simultaneous ability to see the setting sun from their

dissociated vantages. Mileur reads the ideality of shared experience, the conferral of

Coleridge's blessing upon the 'Rook' which flies over their heads and links the disparate

prospects, as substantiating the poem's final claim, that "no sound is dissonant, which

tells of life." (l. 76)

I think, however, that we can read the poem as structured by the peculiar

conversational/lecture model I drew in the previous section. Reading the structure of

conversation delimited in the lecture's back into "Lime-Tree" is a critical maneuver that

should resituate the poem in terms of the present concerns I outlined in my introduction,

and it should allow us to intervene in the discourses of metaphysics and sympathy which

have held sway over its claims to the moniker 'conversation poem.'

Here is the first strophe,

Well, they are gone, and here I must remain,

This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost

Such beauties and such feelings, as had been

Most sweet to have been remember'd, even when age

Had dimm'd my eyes to blindness! (ll. 1-5)

The poem begins with Coleridge in the bower, isolated, not by choice, but rather by the

imposition of the morning's misfortunes. The lime-tree bower is both a prison imposed

upon Coleridge, and yet, as the poem will demonstrate in the final stanza's refiguration of

that bower, it is merely an imagined prison. As I will suggest, the poem is not truly

addressed to Charles Lamb either, it is a poem which fetishizes that mode of address so

as to disavow its more implicit operation, that is, the reconstitution of Coleridge, his

liberation from the prison house of a divided subjectivity. That Coleridge cannot 'speak'

with his theoretical auditors serves only as the pretext for this disavowal of address.

We note that the poem begins in the present tense, Coleridge in the bower, Lamb,

Dorothy and Wordsworth out for an evening walk. From the present scene of writing

Coleridge launches into the complex temporal construction, 'I have lost / such beauties

and such feelings, as had been / most sweet to have remember'd, even when age / had

dimm'd my eyes to blindness!' The scene jumps into an imagined future to lament the

loss of what is now constructed as an imagined past – what was, a line ago, the present

moment of composition. Coleridge begins with a reflection upon a loss of that which he

never had: those beauties and feelings that might have been the experience of the walk

with Lamb, Wordsworth and Dorothy. The communicative break between Coleridge and

his auditors is the same break which always already presupposes conversation, that

impossibility of mutual discourse which instead takes the form of the orator's domination

of the auditor (cf. Sherridan's description of eloquence). The morbid finality of the

whole occasion (or melodrama, depending on how sympathetic a reader feels) is further

emphasized by the poems next line, "My friends, whom I may never meet again, / On

springy heath along the hill-top edge / Wander in gladness." The pause hangs the

meaning of the line over the enjambment and allows us to read the phrase "whom I may

never meet again" as referring directly to "My friends" rather than to "On springy heath,"

thus reinforcing the thanatotic anxiety which the signification of loss generates for

Coleridge.

That poem begins with the image of loss, I think, is the first indication, the

groundwork as it were, of its fetishistic operations. That the poem then expends the

remainder of its narration building up a supplement to the initial loss (a loss, which, as Freud's analysis of the fetish and my own reading of the lecture's suggests, is a loss always already signified) makes clear the procedures of disavowal at work.

To this end we can begin by taking Andrew Bennett's observation that "Lime Tree" begins with the impossibility of communication, and situate that claim within the larger narrative of Coleridgean conversation that I have been developing.[71] Indeed a communicative break, the impossibility of conversation defined as the mutual exchange between an auditor and interlocutor, is sewn into the poem's rhetorical structure and into the scene of its composition. The particularities of that imprisonment within the bower have been effaced by the changes from the framing narrative of the letter to the vague scene delimited by the poem's advertisement, however, the textual traces of the procedure of disavowal still inscribe themselves within and structure of the finished version published in 1800 in the *Annual Review*.

Coleridge goes on to imagine his friends making their way through a series of natural sites. The descriptions are some of the most striking features of the poem, "the roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow and deep… / the Ash from rock to rock / Flings arching like a bridge; that branchless ash / unsunned and damp…the dark-green file of long lank weeds / That all at once (a most fantastic sight!) / still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge / of the dim clay stone." The Ash, a symbol of the bridge which might overcome the divide that currently separates Coleridge from his friends; the lank weeds, an oppositional figuration of the spontaneous and yet timeless and collective drip and spray of the waterfall. However, the seduction reveals, more than anything, a consummate

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[71] See Bennett, "Coleridge's Conversation" in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, 116-138

performance of Coleridge's poetic abilities – one which should come into starker relief having already situated its rhetoric within the context of the framing letter to Southey.

Anne Mellor has noted that the tour which Coleridge leads is one through the hierarchy of late 18th Century aesthetic experiences.[72] Coleridge's friends move from the expansive heath down into the dense foliage of the picturesque, up to the magnificent, smooth and yet hilly fields of the beautiful, and finally, higher still to the sunset itself, the sensible intimation of the supersensible realm "silent with swimming sense…as cloath the Almighty Spirit, when he makes Spirits perceive his presence"(ln.39-44) that elysian prospect which gestures towards infinitude – the realm of the sublime. There is an ethic at work in the upward climb Coleridge arranges. From the paradoxically "still roaring dell" – a picture of contradiction, the dell too is a figuration of that original loss, an absence, or recess, a distinctly yonic image which Coleridge cannot quite sublimate – out of which Coleridge leads his friends; to the more gladdening prospect of the hilltop; and to the ultimate and overwhelming glory of the sunset: each stage is designed to provide a more *renovating virtue*.

Coleridge states,

"In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad

My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou had'st pin'd

And hunger'd after nature many a year

In the great city pent, winning thy way

With sad yet patient soul, thro' evil and pain

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[72] Ann K. Mellor, "Coleridge's 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' and the Categories of English Landscape" <u>Studies in Romanticism</u> (18:1979): 253-270

And strange calamity!" (ll. 27-32)

The evil, pain and strange calamity refer to a recent psychotic episode in which Lamb's sister Mary murdered their mother with a carving knife. Coleridge isolates the 'city pent' as the site of that awful episode, thus offering the various features of the natural world as an alternative, a panacea to the cloistering hysteria of the urban space. While it is tempting to read the 'tour' simply as the natural progression Lamb et al. make through the ethical and aesthetic stages identified, to do this is to collapse the dancer into the dance. That is, we miss the implicit, but naturalized or better, disavowed manipulation of the scene by the masterful hand of Coleridge, here the consummate landscape artist / poet. Indeed the journey is not truly Lamb's, and thus the 'hunger['d] after nature' his neither, but rather it is the ventriloquization of Coleridge's own desire, concealed by its nominal sympathetic gestures. Indeed "Lime-Tree" is not so much a poem about the "long awaited" arrival of friends – the poem it *advertises* itself to be – but rather a poem about Coleridge's mastery over the conversational situation, over that disjuncture in which the poem began, by filling the negative space of its absence with the positive presence of the images he builds up.

Lines such as "now my friends emerge / beneath the wide wide heaven and view again…"(ll. 20-21) "Ah slowly sink / Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!"(ll. 32-33) and "gaze till all doth seem / Less gross than bodily" (ll.40-41), lines which mark the transitions through these stages, both describe and perform. That is, they both make claims about the action of the poem, and perform that action. We can read a line like "now my friends emerge" as referencing the scene in which Coleridge friends have climbed to the top of the hill to witness the sunset: in a sense, as a poetics of citationality

– the ability merely to *re*-present a scene. Or, we can read the same line as inscribing that action, indeed as an example, in J.L. Austin's words, of saying as doing.[73] In the latter case, we hear Coleridge's voice in the text as a voice which performs simultaneously a description and an action. It is a language of self-reference. The lines are able to produce this sort of performative grammar, precisely as a function of Coleridge's own position within the text, that is, his absence and presence from and in the scene of description.

The 'conciliatory tour' we might say, constitutes the double operation of the conversational fetish as well. First, the aesthetic experiences build up that image which allows Coleridge to disavow the initial, imagined loss. Lines 7 – 44 do this through the use of performatives in the manner I sketched above. In Angela Esterhammer's words, they figure 'as the creation of a state,' or to use Coleridge's own lexicon in Kubla Kahn, as "build[ing] that dome in air."[74] The performativity of the language, Coleridge's meta-

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[73] See J.L. Austin, <u>How To Do Things With Words</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Austin, however does not quite posit the ultimate power of language to perform. His famous example of the phrase 'I do,' which completes the actions of a marriage, he argues, can only occur within a specific institutional context. Thus rather than granting language the power to produce, as it were, its own context. Austin only sees the logic of performativity within the frame of citationality, that is, language can only do what it says if everyone agrees ahead of time to abide by its pronouncement. Derrida seizes upon Austin's negation of his own proposition that language can perform itself as an action, by pointing out that the logic of citationality to which Austin ultimately falls back, always already presupposes an institutional context for its success. And as such, citationality simply slides into a chain of endless reduction. Derrida's alternative proposition is a truly performative notion of language, a formulation which affirms languages ability to create its own context, see Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in <u>Limited Inc,</u> trans. Samuel Webber, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988). My own usage of the performative here, should thus be understood in this latter, deconstructive sense.

[74] See Angela Esterhammer, <u>The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism</u> (Stanford: Stanford UP, 200), 144-186; cf. Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn" ll. 45-46 in *PW* I:178

poeisis within the poem, in this respect informs the turn in the third and final stanza towards self-satisfaction in the present moment,

> A delight
>
> Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
>
> As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
>
> This little lime-tree bower have I not mark'd
>
> Much that has sooth'd me (ll.45-49).

Coleridge here reflects upon his position in the bower, with which he is all the sudden delighted. However, we can also read that line, 'a delight comes sudden on my heart' as a reference to the actions of poetic inscription he has been performing over the previous two stanzas. It is a metapoetic line, a reflection upon the act of composition in the poem and the poet's power to inscribe his words upon the surround.   The 'delight' which 'comes sudden' on Coleridge's heart is a delight, in this sense, with his own poetic powers. And, in this respect, it is poetry which has generated the imaginative capacity to overcome that initial loss in which the poem began.

The reconstitution of the self, the literal and figurative recuperation of potency vis a vis the layering over of lack, engenders the *pregnant* metaphor that organizes the poem's final lines – we notice too that it is not the dell, with its yonic, picturesque implications, but rather the masculinized, Burkean sublime which begets the turn. The 'spirit of delight' expressed here is the causal link to the poem's penultimate consolation, the lines 'tis' well to be bereft of promis'd good, / that we may lift the soul and contemplate / with lively joy the joys we cannot share.' (ll.65-67)

Coleridge has consummately sublimed that initial loss of promised good into a substantiation of his own creative energies, he has turned a loss into a gain. However, so as to deny the implied egotism of his own performative success, to disavow his phallic powers of inscription as it were – what has retrospectively been revealed to be the latent work of the poem – the lines also gesture towards externality, they extend the blessing to Lamb, indeed feebly make Lamb, as Coleridge had done in the first two stanza's, the object of consolation. Yet the insincerity of that gesture throughout is perhaps best characterized by Coleridge's perpetual use of the epithet, "Gentle-hearted Charles." Indeed the very ability to name, let alone to produce an epithet that is ostensibly sympathetic but beneath that veneer grossly patronizing, is but a confirmation of the speaker's own primacy.[75] Indeed we should remember, in the context of the lecture format and here in the poem as well, that to address an auditor is to imagine the simultaneous reproduction of one's own speech act within the ears and mind of that auditor, in a sense an apostrophic confirmation of one's own subjectivity which asserts a kind of mastery over the other.[76]

Coleridge also naturalizes the supernatural experience of his poetic inscription upon the void, his 'saying as doing', by investing the bower with its own aesthetic self-organization,

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[75] Indeed Lamb wrote to Coleridge on August 6th of 1800, after the publication of "Lime Tree" in *The Annual Anthology*, "For God's sake (I never was more serious), don't make me ridiculous any more by terming me gentle-hearted in print, or do it in better verses. It did well enough five years ago when I came to see you, and was moral coxcomb enough at the time you wrote the lines, to feed upon such epithets." The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb ed. Edwin W. Mars Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975), I:217

[76] In Speech and Phenomena, Derrida links this structure of address to an imagined control over signifier. However, within the context of *Lime-Tree-Bower*, I think the operation is more indicative of the fetishistic control over the subject of address, predicated that is, upon an implicit distance.

Pale beneath the blaze hung the transparent foliage;

And I watch'd some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see

The shadow of the leaf and stem above

Dappling its sunshine! / ...

Henceforth I shall know

That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure. (ll. 48-60)

The return to the bower needs to be figured in the past tense, so as to retroactively assure us that it has not in fact been a prison, but rather the site of liberation from Coleridge's *sentence*. We might notice, however that the line in which Coleridge begins to actively assert his presence, to put to use the images he *hath been building*, to overcome that conversational disjuncture, is a line that protests a bit too much. "As I myself were there! Nor in this bower" is overloaded with an extra syllable, an irregular line made irregular by its very effort to link the two scenes. "I myself" is a double confirmation. It is a proposition which in fact mimics the self-conscious mechanisms of subject formation (the positing of the self "I" and the objective / beholdent referral to that self "myself"), and yet in so much as the line stands as a synecdoche for the entire operation of the poem, it fittingly produces its own irregularity; as 'nor' is necessary to the construction of the double negative produced by the following line "This little lime tree bower have I not marked," a double negative which then permits Coleridge to turn the bower into a positive image. While the line performs, in miniature, the process of subject formation, its overflow produces the rupture in an otherwise seamless procedure of layering over the gap. The fetish, as it were, cannot help but deposit the traces of its overabundance.

The third stanza of the poem is thus faced with a theoretical double bind and a

practical Hobson's choice that determine its fetishistic premise. Coleridge can acknowledge his own manipulation of Lamb and company, that is, acknowledge his own performative construction of the 'tour' thus overcoming that initial distance by facing, rather than turning awry from an implied impossibility of communication. Or Coleridge can disavow that distance and its implied structure of manipulation by re-framing the poem as a conciliatory exercise, as a descriptive narrative which naturalizes Coleridge's self insertion into the scene of narration, his presence along side Lamb and Dorothy and Wordsworth and his claim that their nature walk will be a bestowal upon them (but 'Lamb methinks' most of all). The former scenario is not really a choice at all, for that poem would be an explicit and absurdly narcissistic act of self-congratulation, a purely masturbatory exercise. It is really the latter option that Coleridge must choose in writing the poem, and thus, it is the reconstitution of the self that the poem must disavow. Hence the operation of the conversational fetish, that mechanism which allows Coleridge to both reclaim his potency through the layering over of the initiatory lack, while composing a poem that is ostensibly addressed to, and designed to console, Charles Lamb. "Lime Tree," as Newlyn, Everest and Rajan have suggested, is very much a poetic success. It achieves its figurative consummation. However, to consummate that idea of conversation, the poem must also fetishize it, and as such, deposit the traces of its disavowal movements.

CHAPTER 3

'O Harp Eolian:' The *Table Talk* of Coleridge and "Effusion XXXV"

I

"I am almost tempted to dream that I have once listened to Plato in the groves of   the
Academy."
Thomas Allsop: Letters, Conversations and Recollections of S.T. Coleridge

"Mr. Coleridge's affectionate disciples learned their lessons of philosophy and criticism
from his own mouth. He was to them as an old master of the Academy or the Lyceum."
TT II:11

In the previous two chapters I tried to show how certain conversational frames –

the narrative I called *literalization*, which is more generally referred to as 18th Century

ballad revivalism; and the lecture as a mode of 'conversational fetish' generated by the

particular role Coleridge came to take on as public lecturer, and focused by a larger

historical situation of pantisocractic scheming – structured my accounts of 'The

Nightingale' and 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison'. In this chapter I offer a

contemporary analysis of Coleridge's reputation as a conversationalist – what I will call

the myth of Coleridge as talker (the phrasing 'Coleridge as talker', the construction of a

metaphor, is intentional, indeed it is symptomatic of the narrative I wish to tell about that

reputation) – as it gets processed by Henry Nelson Coleridge's (hereafter referred to as

HNC) *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, a volume which both

drew upon and substantiated that reputation.

Allsop's recollection of Coleridge's conversation, quoted above and paired here

with its paraphrase, made by HNC in the preface to the 1836 edition of the Table Talk,

serves double purpose. It signals the reach of Coleridge's reputation as talker – a

reputation which stretched as far as New England and the American West, coloring the

first impressions of figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Fenimore Cooper – and

it reproduces a number of ideologies constitutive of that reputation: ideologies which, as I

will argue throughout this chapter, form a recursive matrix of Coleridge's celebrity as

talker. Allsop's slip, the substitution of Plato for Socrates, which is then flattened by

HNC in the preface into a general picture of Socratic education, collapses the amanuensis

into the speaker. The conflation of the two figures epitomizes a Romantic effort – one

particularly characteristic of Coleridge's own ideology of artistic production – to

overcome the distance and difference between speaking and writing, between interlocutor

and auditor, between the imagined *presentness* of speech and the posterity of text, while

the quotation from the preface to the *Table Talk* makes this effort its primary aesthetic

project by simultaneously reproducing Allsop's remarks within its own textual space.

The structure of citation, demonstrated here, is just one example of the infinite chain of

referrals which I believe constructs the myth.

Allsop's comment is structured by liminality, it balances on the edge of dream

and reality 'I am *almost* tempted to dream,' and in between a sense of the present and a

memory of the present constructed through the use of the *present perfect progressive* 'I

am…that I have once listened.' Both operations – the slip and the rhetoric of *in*

betweeness – paired with and reproduced by HNC's remark, figure Coleridge's

conversation as epiphenomenal, as an effect distinct from its cause. Structurally

epiphenominality serves as a hinge of disavowal. It reframes the paradigm of loss which

governs the act of textual transcription when that act is conceived as merely tracing the

logos; and cancels out the specific technical limitations faced by contemporary auditors undertaking to transcribe the conversation itself. Sir Philip Sidney's own gloss on the genre of the table talk in his *Defense of Poesy*, "words as they chanceably fall from the mouth," is useful here.[77] The word 'chanceably' signals the same erasure of the genre's own interest and disinterest to record conversation and reproduce it textually, by drawing the auditor in so close to the discourse that he may simply absorb it. The picture Sydney draws, through a rhetoric of intimacy, attempts to overcome the division between auditor and interlocutor in the same manner as the inter-textual relationship of Allsop's recollection and HNC's prefatory remark I drew above, that is, by writing that relationship under erasure. Indeed, as Derrida reminds us, the western metaphysical tradition of privileging the presence of speech begins with the construction of a Socratic ideology; for after all we *know* Socrates, historically and of course paradoxically, as "he who does not write." I would argue that the *Table Talk* undertakes the same project, only that its form is also determined by a range of discourses contemporary to its production.

We now find that 'talker' is a convenient epithet for Coleridge. In our own moment it has become commonplace to speak of Coleridge's contributions to western metaphysics – his theory of the symbol, the distinction between fancy and imagination, the propaedeutical *Logosophia* – and to 18th and 19th century British verse, all in the same conversation as his 'talk' (in a work like the Table Talk similar contributions are often woven into the texture of any one conversational entry). What I have called commonplace refers quite literally to the presence that 'talk' has enjoyed in our critical and pedagogical discourse for the past sixty odd years. In fact sixty years ago the editors

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[77] Philip Sidney, <u>The Defense of Poetry, Otherwise Known as An Apology for Poetry</u>, ed. Albert S. Cook (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1890), 11.

Richard Armour and Raymond Howes announced and reiterated in the introductory

matter to their volume, *Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and*

Comments, a program to renew the currency of what had characteristically been the

man's greatest gift, that is, his 'conversation.'[78] I would point out that recent collections

of essays on Coleridge – which always serve something like a double function: that of a

précis and prioritized sketch of a given field – such as *The Cambridge Companion to*

Coleridge edited by Lucy Newlyn, and *The Coleridge Connection* edited by Richard

Gravil and Molly Lefebure, and even more specialized volumes like *Coleridge's*

Visionary Languages Edited by Tim Fulford and Morton Paley (all published within the

last 15 years by major university presses) take Coleridge's 'conversation' – the literal

transcripts, the reflections of Coleridge himself on those occasions of conversation, and

contemporary accounts given by friends, neighbors and strangers of their own

engagements with Coleridge the 'talker' – as an object worth serious inquiry: as an aspect

of the field no longer requiring *renewal*: in a word, as part and parcel of a *canon*.

Seamus Perry's recent essay "Coleridge the Talker" sets itself the ambitious task

of precipitating out, from the metonymic personality of 'Coleridge the talker,' a real and

historically present S.T. Coleridge who happened to do a lot of talking. While the goal is

laudable, I think Perry can't quite accomplish the task. Indeed the real S.T. Coleridge

which emerges (and Perry tacitly admits this) looks a great deal like the mythologized

figure of the contemporary accounts culled by Howes and Armour. Indeed Perry's

failure becomes the object lesson of this chapter – a study of how text and context

collapse into one another and create a recursive structure of the myth.

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[78] Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes eds., <u>Coleridge the Talker: A Series of</u>
<u>Contemporary Descriptions and Comments</u> (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1940), 3-14.

I follow this rather lengthy examination of the traces and spaces of the myth of Coleridge as talker with a reading of – compositionally – the earliest of Coleridge's conversation poems, the "Eolian Harp." Unlike the poem's I have examined my previous two chapters, "The Eolian Harp" cannot be said to have taken determinate form within the discursive context I examine here. So rather than reading conversation back into the poem – again, as I have done throughout – I use "Eolian Harp" as an analytical tool for thinking through some of the aesthetic problems raised by the *Table Talk*.

II

Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge was first published in 1835 as a series of conversational transcripts, arranged chronologically, and printed with a six-page appendix of previously unpublished verse. (*TT* II:499) The edition was printed in 2 volumes totaling 372 pages, 2024 copies were run off by the London printer John Murray, 1939 of which had sold by 1838. (*TT* II:500) The success of the first edition had prompted its editor, Coleridge's nephew and son in law HNC, to enlarge upon the collection of fragments and to put together an extensive second edition. HNC began the project that was to become the first volume after his older brother, John Taylor Coleridge (hereafter referred to as JTC), had begun to compile the first small-scale record of his uncle's conversation.   JTC's *Table Talk* contained conversational material recorded on two dates, April 21st 1811 and January 9th 1823, the occasions: a visit made by JTC to his uncle in Richmond, and a dinner at JTC's home. The volume is stylistically casual, the events of conversation are narrated in the first person, "On Thursday my uncle Sam and

Sara dined with us…it is impossible to carry off or commit to paper his long trains of argument, indeed it is not always possible to understand them," (*TT* I:16) and JTC, as the above quotation indicates, rarely attempts a verbatim reproduction of his uncle's discourse. Rather JTC writes around and about the subjects that evidently came up over the course of the meals, "we then got, I know not how, to German topics. He said the language of their literature was entirely factitious, and had been formed by Luther from the two dialects, High and Low German." (*TT* I:5)

If JTC's effort was a casual, an almost banal fuzzy picture of his uncle's discourse, a description perhaps best summarized by the comment towards the end of the April 20th session, "I have heard him more brilliant, but he was very fine," (*TT* I:16) then the task his younger brother set himself,was nothing less than to install a fully realized monument.[79] HNC outlines, in the preface to the second edition published in 1836,

> A man who had traveled in many countries and in critical times; who had
>
> seen and felt the world in most of its ranks and many of its vicissitudes
>
> and weaknesses; one to whom all literature and genial art were absolutely
>
> subject, and to whom, with a reasonable allowance as to technical details,
>
> all science was in most extraordinary degree familiar. (*TT* II:9)

Both editions of TT edited by HNC (1835 and 1836) were more than a modest collection of transcripts of conversation. The 1835 text compiled passages dating from December 29th 1822 until July 5th 1834, while the 1836 edition emended the earlier December dates and added additional material that ran through July 10th 1834. The 1836 text also printed JTC's record as a coda to the volumes final entry, a short meditation on *euthanasia*,

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[79] HNC was 12 when JTC began to record his version of the table talk, and was invited to attend the dinner where the project began.

fitting as Coleridge would pass away four days after the final conversational entry. The

two texts are ranging, however, for the purposes of this chapter, I will not do much to

distinguish between the editions. Carl Woodring has tracked the changes and expansions

from the first edition to the second in enormous detail.[80] Suffice it to say that both take a

similar shape – they are arranged chronologically, each entry listed under a rubric of

topics – and both execute the same editorial project, the chrestomathization of

Coleridge's conversation; the gathering up under the aegis of a single systematic order,

the fragments, detritus and remains; an effort to mobilize and motivate all we have of the

man's voice.

Scanning the pages of TT we find the epigrammatic aphorisms for which

Coleridge is popularly known today, for example on August 25th 1827 Coleridge was said

to have uttered, "prose = words in the best order. Poetry = the best words in the best

order." (*TT* I:90) Other entries track highly abstruse musings on the nature of defunct

topics like *animal magnetism* and *phrenology*. There are multiple page disquisitions on

the prophecies of the Old Testament, conservative critiques of the national debt, and

meditations on epidemiology and the social practice of controlling *atmospheric disease*

(sickness which was thought to be spread through the air in miasmas). The focus of the

volume is certainly on the range of Coleridge's knowledge, and as such it is an often odd

and intimidatingly recondite text to come to terms with. The form, which is a function of

HNC's editorial project and process, however, is what I am concerned with here. If the

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[80] The introduction and footnotes to the Bollingen edition of *TT* are copius and largely
dedicated to charting the changes HNC made from workbook, to manuscript to the
printed texts of 1835 and 1836. That edition also contains a table of changes made to the
dates of the entries as HNC listed them in manuscript and in subsequent printed editions.
See (*TT* I:xi-cxix)

materials gathered together for Armour and Howes' *Coleridge the Talker* were extant, and presumably available to HNC as literary executor of Coleridge's estate, why not anthologize those remains? Why not include them as addenda to the 1836 edition? Why only produce a record of the talk in and for itself? The form which both editions of TT take, a form which excludes the contextualizing materials that are gathered and reproduced for a modern – distanced – audience by Armour and Howes, is an expression of the *exchange value* a textual record of Coleridge's talk would have had. The literary marketplace confirmed HNC's suspicion that a veritable record was all one needed to produce, in order to successfully mobilize and sustain Coleridge's reputation as talker. There are, however, a number of discourses which hold sway over the shape of HNC's editorial project, all of which determined the commercial success of TT, not the least of those being the material conditions or constraints of the transcriptive process itself.

A series of workbooks, which contain the material published in the 1835 edition as well as the additional material found in the expanded text of 1836, are the earliest surviving record of the talk itself, that is, of the transcript for each conversational entry as it is published in TT. The workbooks are not solely dedicated to the stuff that would become TT, they also double as the occasional diary for the editorial process itself. Which is literally to say that the workbooks provide an archeology of, in HNC's own words, an effort to "listen closely to [Coleridge's] talk and endeavor afterwards to preserve some of it." (*TT* I:lxxxvi) The description, given here by HNC to his wife (and daughter of Coleridge) Sara, is indeed one of the few records we have of the compositional process of TT. We know that the comment was prompted by Sara's own reluctance to contribute to the work as it was in progress. She is clear enough in a letter,

"as to my contributions to 'Table-Talk', I am ashamed to say that they really amount to a mere nothing. Two or three short memorables I remember recording; and I often wonder now how I could have been so negligent a listener."[81] HNC made his entreaty to his wife, but the remark, made in 1827 just four years after he had begun to record in earnest, already gestures towards the force with which the posthumous life of Coleridge's talk would persist. Sara's own comment, reflecting albeit from a position in which she would have already been able to grasp the commercial success of TT, constructs the past as a memory in the present, 'as to my contributions…they really amount to a mere nothing,' and in so doing, also elucidates the sense of historicity with which the project was undertaken. The loss, the result of her *negligent listening*, is both regrettable on a personal level and on the cultural level to which HNC gestures and to which she can observe from her present vantage.

The quotation also entertains a double possibility for the method of *preserving the talk*. HNC might have made a record literally after the fact of 'events' in which talk was taking place, or he might have recorded his uncle's talk while listening carefully as it *chanceably fell from his mouth*. HNC most likely practiced both methods, and both methods, as 'ex post facto' endeavors to 'afterwards [to] preserve some of [Coleridge's conversation]' are merely distinguished by the length of the delay between act of utterance and act of transcription, and as such both are structured by the same relative sense of loss.

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[81] Sara Coleridge, Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge ed. Edith Coleridge, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 105

It becomes possible to read HNC's efforts as privileging the content of conversation. The project to 'listen closely' and 'preserve' in this case referring to the essential imagistic and ideational aspects of the talk. The entries certainly bear this out. However, we might also characterize the project as a representation of ephemerality, a picture of rhetorical etiolation rendered by a logic and a practice of transcription which cannot help but trace the motions and vicissitudes of the talk, i.e. its formal properties. The workbooks are one indication that this was the primary practical aim. Their frequent erasures, strike marks, short hand notation, illustrations, changes in thickness of nib – most likely from the relative and changing pressures applied by the pen – and the occasional flourishes of scrawling penmanship which mark the rapid acceleration of the hand, suggest not only that HNC recorded his uncle's talk in the moment of its discoursing, but that he plainly struggled to keep pace while trying to do justice to its formal and conceptual aspects. In a particularly revealing passage from the manuscripts for the 1835 edition (taken from a workbook entry of the same date) HNC writes, 'but he never in any way led to bottom the Religion', which we note is a syntactic impossibility given that 'religion' signals the start of a separate discourse which followed on the nature of the mosaic covenant. (*TT* I:lxxxvii,) Such instances, where phrases anticipate and incorporate features of a succeeding clause seem to indicate slippages in the actual transcriptive process where HNC, in an attempt to keep up with the pace of his uncle's talk, skipped ahead to record the germ of the next movement entirely.[82] In effect, we can theorize HNC's process, described here, as an effort to jump ahead of the discursive event so as to look backward upon its unfolding. The slips and syntactic substitutions

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[82] See Manuscript F under appendix C (*TT* I:22-537) for a series of workbook pages which track the same kinds of logical and discursive place jumping.

map onto a theory of the sublime, and as such make aesthetic sense of the project, both in part (each conversational entry) and in whole (the volume's form as chrestomathy of fragments). Indeed the transcriptive process itself, conceived in terms of the discursive place jumping, proceeds as an endlessly dialectical structure (and a masochistic one at that, where the pleasure is derived precisely from the endlessly circular, fort/da process), the overcoming signaling both a break in the discursive economy of Coleridge's talk, and the initiation of a new sequence.

Let me explain my use of the sublime here, as it is the structure of the Kantian *analytic* which I adapt to explain the method and formal procedure of TT. The sublime is an aesthetical mode of experience, and as such it serves as a conceptual model for making sense of particular cognitive phenomena inherent to the Kantian system. The phenomena can be glossed, simply, as the undoing of the subject's faculty of understanding, which occurs through an engagement with the idea of the infinite. For Kant, the infinite, qua the absolutely large, presents itself for cognition as pure formlessness.[83] However, because the faculty of the understanding operates through formal comprehension, in effect through the intermediary faculty of the imagination which gathers the manifold of primary intuitions (sense impressions) into a representation to be brought under the concepts or categories, the intimation of the infinite as sizeable beyond compare and yet without form is precisely what undoes the operations of the understanding. Kant argues in the third critique,

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[83] Kant's notion of the infinite, it should be noted, is different from other enlightenment and post enlightenment formulations of infinity, in that it is an infinite which is not linear, but infinitely dimensional, a model of the infinite similar to a post-classical physical one of infinite expansion in the manner of super-string theories.

> In receiving a quantum into the imagination by intuition, in order to be able to use it for measure…there are two operations of the imagination involved *apprehension (apprehensio)* and *comprehension (comprehensio aesthetica)*. As to apprehension there is no difficulty, for it can go on *ad infinitum*; but comprehension becomes harder the further apprehension advances, and soon attains to its maximum, viz. the greatest possible aesthetical fundemantal measure for the estimation of magnitude.[84]

The parallel operations of apprehension and comprehension function as the analogues of the intuitions and the imagination working under the service of the understanding. While the former operation progresses towards the infinite, the latter strains after it, struggling to overcome the distance between the intimation of that which is absolutely large (effected through the operation of apprehension) and the power of the imagination to bring that intuition of absolute magnitude under total representational control through concepts of the understanding. This struggle towards comprehension is rather a futile one, it is impossible to represent that which manifests without form to the understanding, and this is why the sublime moment, what Kant calls the checking of the vital forces, is characterized by an absence, the sublime being precisely what persists in excess of our representational/comprehensible faculties and, as such, as a signal of our own mortality. The understanding's futile pursuit of a quantifiable notion of the infinite undoes the subject, splitting its cognitive faculties under the strains of the understanding to bring the intuition of the infinite under a formalized concept. The struggle, however, engenders what Kant refers to as the subreptive force of 'reason;' the force of the breakdown of the

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[84] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment. Trans. J. H., Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1951), 111.

understanding is the force with which reason overcomes the powers of representation, indicating, in an instance of a truly reflexive consciousness, the power of our mind literally to behold its own shortcomings, and as a result, to lift itself above the ideality of the infinite through its grasp of the negative element in representation. Through reason are we able to sense that which is not present to the seeing mind of the understanding. In so doing, reason functions to reconstitute the subject who had been split under the stress of gap between the intuitions and the understanding.

The sublime is, in this sense, characteristically romantic in its structural operation and desideratum. It turns the force of negation into the force of the overcoming, the force of our undoing into the force of our reconstitution, an infinite loss into an infinite gain.

The *in*formal manner (the manner of the form as informal) of the workbooks demonstrates an unwitting though nonetheless productive troping of the category of the sublime. The workbooks often depict HNC straining to bring his uncle's talk under a concept of the understanding, quite literally to represent it to himself in writing, while the jumps in syntactical logic recorded between topics indicate the overcoming staged by the operative principle of reason. The ability to, when faced with the prospect of the infinite, gain a purchase on the idea of it through a supersensible faculty is in this case made manifest in the jump ahead as an extrication on the part of reason from the sublime excess of the talk's discursive totality.

Reason's overcoming, its subrepture of the understanding as the imagination strains after the infinite, indeed gets represented as the break in the contiguity of the talk. In effect the process of overcoming – which, as I have suggested, is a function of the process of transcription – serves as the form producing rupture which brings the

individual entries in the workbooks into being as fragments of conversation. As I

mentioned earlier, the finished products, both the 1835 and 1836 editions of TT, are

organized by date and within each date framed by a glossary of topics. The syntactical

substitutions which traced the ruptures in transcription are replaced by transitional

phrases like 'whereas,' 'and so,' and 'or,' phrases which seek to heal the breaches in the

logical turns between the subjects and contents of any one entry's argument. If the

discourse of the sublime allows us to see the compositional process and the rough

outlines of the project, then discourses of fragmentation serve as a model for through

which we might read the project's determinate form. That form plays out as an

aestheticization of its fragmentary status, as the motivation of the sublime ruptures that

create its tesseral scheme. The project's editorial finality is performed through a range of

discourses or *fragment theories* already circulating as HNC began his process, and as

such they are also discourses which secure the commercial success of TT.

The German rationalist philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was the first to lay

the mathematico/epistemological groundwork for any Romantic concept of

fragmentariness. Leibniz argued that it was possible to conceive of a form that

reproduces itself in each incremental expression of a larger system. Leibniz, however,

could only conceive of this form as a line, the simple function y=mx+b, where each value

for y is always an expression of its relationship to the constant rate at which x is

changing. What Leibniz could only theorize and rudimentarily formulate in the late 17th

century, we now know as a fractal, which can be glossed as the category of complex and

multidimensional geometric functions that expand and elaborate on the Leibnizian theory of incremental repetition.[85]

The single line, however, cannot account for the difference and differentiation of the reproductive logic of the fractal as we know it in mathematical terms, and as the romantics knew it in aesthetic and philosophic modes. Recursion is the term we now use to describe the way in which fractals produce their form and reproduce that form within each incremental expression of the function as a whole. The 1904 advertisement for Droste Cacao, a Dutch cocoa powder demonstrates nicely the aesthetical application of recursion. The woman in the advertisement is holding a box of Droste Cacao powder, on which an image of the same woman holding a box of the same Droste Cacao powder is printed. The logical twist of the whole image is that its incremental reproduction of a general picture (a woman holding a box of cacao powder) goes on ad infinitum, and as such produces a recursive effect in which the image cannot be defined by its relationship to a referent. Rather the image as a whole is self-contained and self-defined, literally self referencing because its process of reproduction has no origin (no referent) outside of itself. The ad forms a veritable Wittgensteinian ladder. **(Appendix B)** Liebniz' 'line' is not quite recursive in this sense, as it cannot reproduce itself as a distinct form. It is Friedrich Schlegel's theory of the system which offers the best Romantic purchase on any contemporary notion of recursion, or fractologic.

Schlegel, a member of the influential Jena school of philosophers was the first to actualize the concept of Romanticism that we recognize today i.e. as an emergent

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[85] Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, <u>Philosophical Writings of Leibniz</u>, G. H. R. Parkinson, and Mary Morris eds. (London: Dent, 1973)

secularism instantiating the ironic mode with which we live out our relationship to the

real, and perhaps more importantly to the concerns of this chapter, Schlegel theorized

Romanticism as an epistemology and ontology of fragmentation. In developing a

recognizable Romanticism Schlegel and the Jena school were able to hold sway over

German philosophic and artistic production which laid claim to that same title, while also

disseminating their ideas through translation and transnationalism. Paul Hamilton's

recent work in "Coleridge's Stamina" and *Coleridge and German Philosophy* has been

dedicated to excavating Coleridge's role as an important transnational site for the work of

German and British Romantics. Indeed Coleridge had been seriously taken up with the

output of the Jena Romantics as early as 1799 during his visit to Germany.[86]

Schlegel notes the veritable flatness in the idea of the fragment – as the individual

points on a line – theorized by Leibniz when he begins to set out the criteria for a

Romantic notion of system in his Atheneaum Fragments. Schlegel writes, "an idea is a

concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the

continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts."[87] The idea of the system

is an organic one, or to unpack that convenient paraphrase that has become part of a

standard operating Romantic lexicon, the Schlegalian notion of a system does not consist

in the realization of a totality which locks its constitutive components into place, rather

its is the *gestalt*, defined precisely as the processual traffic between its parts. Schlegel

calls this the 'continual self-creating interchange.' The 'irony' to which Schlegel refers is

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[86] For discussion of the Jena Romantics the following (*CN* I:340, 1128, 1127) and (*CN Notes* I:189, 224, 337, 433, 787)

[87] Athenaeum Fragment 121 in Friedrich von Schlegel, Philosophical Fragments trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 33. Hereafter cited in text.

precisely distance through which we grasp the processual working of the system. It is the incommensurability of the system with a notion of the absolute, or rather irony is the asymptotic logic through which we think the relationship between part and whole which is itself the system.

If it is irony that offers the conceptual purchase on the ontology and epistemology of the schlegalian notion of the system, then it is the fragment through which irony is expressed, i.e. formalized. Indeed Schlegel thinks the system through a concept of the fragment – which, throughout the *Athenaeum* is often substituted metaleptically for the Romantic work of art. Schlegel argues, "a work is *cultivated* when it is everywhere delimited, but within those limits limitless and inexhaustible; when it is completely faithful to itself, entirely homogeneous, and nonetheless exalted above itself". (59)[88] The fragment, as entirely delimited and yet limitless, is the formalization of a paradox, or an order of irony through which the fragment both instantiates and gestures towards the larger workings of the system to which, like any one expression of the Droste Cacao Woman within the matrix of the advertisement, it is necessarily a part.

That TT lays claim precisely to this fractological form is not a coincidence, but a function of Coleridge's thinking and HNC's effort to make a record of the scope and operations of that *thinking*. In a notebook entry Coleridge writes,

> There are two sorts of talkative fellows whom it would be injurious to
> confound, and I, S.T. Coleridge, am the latter…[those] who use five

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[88] Fragment 297. I want to emphasize that 'cultivated,' here, should be understood as 'cultivating' so as to avoid any confusion with the final or finished status the term 'cultivat*ed*' might immediately call to mind. The metalepsis it should be noted, is not accidental either, but rather indicative of Schlegel's project to synthesize poetry and philosophy, two fields which had classically been considered antitheses.

hundred more ideas, images and reasons &c than there is any need of to

arrive at their object / till the only object arrived at is that the mind's eye

of the bye-stander is dazzled with colors…I feel to intensely the

omnipresence of the all in each. (*CN* II:2372)

Coleridge laments what is also characteristically his gift. The logic of fragmentation, the

appearance of the 'all in each', the each thus tracing the operations of the larger system of

which it is the incremental expression, functions practically to dazzle and overwhelm the

auditor. As we have seen in the case of HNC, Coleridge's mode of conversing is

precisely what necessitates the fragmentary shape of its record, and yet the fractologic

with which Coleridge delivers his discourse, or at least purports to in the notebook entry

produced above, is precisely what HNC believed would have saved the volume from

mere babel.

Conversation was not the only valence of fragmentation in Coleridge's work.

Kubla Khan, for instance, is a poem in which Coleridge invents the disruption that brings

the poem into being as complete or poetically closed fragment.[89] The note which

accompanied the text as it was published in *Poetical Works* in the 1828 and 1829 editions

explains, famously, how the author was in the process of transcribing an oneriric reverie

when he was interrupted by a person on business from Porlock, which kept him for about

an hour. Upon returning to finish the effort, the memory had vanished, "some eight or

ten scattered lines and images [remained], all the rest had passed away the images on the

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[89] For a more detailed study of the fragmentary form of Kubla Kahn, see Marjorie
Levinson, The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form (Chapel Hill: UNC Press,
1986), 97-114 and E.S. Shaffer, 'Kubla Kahn' And The Fall of Jerusalem: The
Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880 (Cambridge:
Cambridge UP, 1975), 145-190.

surface of a stream." (*PW Variorum* I:178) The poem which follows, Coleridge insists, is brought into being through interruption, thus isolated as fragment-text from its larger aesthetical context, and yet laying a simultaneous claim to having expressed the form of the "dream of pain and disease" which is its origin. The project in its totality, what would have been *the vision of the dream*, is unknowable to us, rather the *vision in a dream* is what remains and negotiates a relationship with the whole trance Coleridge professed to have been possessed by.

Finally, even moments in TT comment on the fragmentary thinking of the system in Coleridge's work. Coleridge *says* on September 12th 1832,

> I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate
> what that system means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of
> view, from which I enable it to see its former position, where it was,
> indeed, but under another light and with different relations; - so that the
> fragment of truth is not only acknowledged but explained. (*TT* II:148)

There is a sense of the performative in the quotation appropriate to the contexts of TT. The rhetorical construction of the passage collapses its perlocutionary features into the illocutionary, 'I show each system…but then I lift up…I enable,' such that each successive phrase demonstrates a synthesis between 'saying and doing.'

The performative grammar also emphasizes the passage's function as oratory, that is, as the speech genre where an utterance, in the moment of its delivery, inscribes itself upon the listener as an action. We can see that the formal components of Coleridge's performance emphasize process over outcome. This holds true for the content of the passage as well. Coleridge explains here that his own philosophical investigations are

anti-foundational in character and dialectical in method. The ground upon which postulations stand is not fixed but ceaselessly recursive, indeed when we remove some of the descriptive or merely repetitious matter from the passage we lay bare the dialectical method which is its operative principle, 'I show…what that system means…but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view…I enable it to see its former position…but under another light and with different relations.' The 'truth' for Coleridge is based on the double movement of instantiation and sublimation, the operative traces of which are 'acknowledged' and 'explained' by the fragmentary form of knowledge produced by any system. The totality of the system is never realized because that knowledge, qua knowledge produced, is always shifting along a discursive axis and within a recursive matrix of relations. The fragment is the form of knowledge which has been isolated from its productive matrix and yet stands, ironically, bound in the negative to its systematic crucible.

What the passage demonstrates, through a synthesis of its form and content, is the ironic perfection which Schlegel defined as the work of art. As a performance the passage realizes the limits of its formal potential – the ability to represent the manner of the whole in the motion of the particular. Its conceptual material articulates simultaneously the limits of the form. What is produced in the synthesis is truly writing as meta-writing, particularly when we consider that the passage appears in TT in effect as an unwitting commentary on the formal shape of that project itself.

When we come across a passage like this in TT we cannot help but be shocked by the unwitting effect of the dialectical relationship between the form and content of the volume. What I have been avoiding throughout, however, as I have tried to go about

mapping the particularities of the discursive/editorial formation of TT, is precisely the architectonic which props up, coheres and stands behind the volume as a whole, that is, the myth of Coleridge as talker.

Let me say something about my use of myth. I understand myth to be a kind of mediating category, or a way of giving form to the multivocal material/cultural space in which reputations circulate. TT is one valence of the myth as indicated by its reception, however, TT certainly would not have been produced had Coleridge's reputation as a talker not been a wider and deeper phenomenon than a small scale social status. Indeed the myth of Coleridge as talker in its largest sense, can be read as the function (in mathematical terms) of which each entry in TT (and consequently the whole volume, as a series of these entries) is an articulation. The logical problems we run into, however, when trying to trace the origins of this reputation, i.e. our efforts to locate its switchpoint between what we might call the private circulation within an immediate social milieu and a public presence so ranging that Coleridge's home lodgings in highgate became a veritable tourist stop on the culture trail,[90] are the same one's faced by the recursive structure of the fractal, and in aesthetical terms the problems of the Droste Cocao box and the form of the entries in *TT*.

Let me clarify this problem of locating the switch point by way of a contemporary description of Coleridge's talk given by a neighbor during the Highgate residence. Mrs. John Davy, paraphrasing one of Wordsworth's favorite metaphors for Coleridge's talk (conversation figured as the image of a river), is unwittingly characteristic in describing the operation of the myth,

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[90] See Seamus Perry, "Coleridge the Talker" in The Cambridge Companion To Coleridge ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) in particular pp. 103-105.

He said that the liveliest and truest image he could give of Coleridge's talk was, 'that of a majestic river, the sound or sight of whose course you caught at intervals, which was sometimes concealed by forests, sometimes lost in sand, then came flashing out broad and distinct, then again took a turn which your eye could not follow, yet you knew and felt that it was the same river: so,' he said, 'there was always a train, a stream, in Coleridge's discourse."

The quotation, as I mentioned above, and like the incremental materialization and dematerialization of the governing logic of any one Coleridgean effusion, comes to us through a series of intermediaries i.e. ideologies which structure the auditorial experience. Mrs. Davy's gloss demonstrates, on the page, the formal characteristics of 'gossip'. It sketches a context, 'the truest and liveliest image…of Coleridge's talk', and then stakes that claim on the word of another. In this case, it is Wordsworth's metaphor, the image of 'a majestic river,' that nests within Mrs. Davy's description.

Wordsworth's primarily experiential account of observing Coleridge talk, a uniquely aesthetical one which uses a visual economy to describe an auditory experience, serves both as an apt description of the conversation as singular 'event' and as a better metacommentary on how the myth itself functions. In the passage's description of the auditorial moment, the river figures as something of a coherence principle or a second order of signification which obtains as the unifying thread of the discourse, 'there was always a train, a stream.' Though the talk is coruscating – only intermittently illuminating – its imagistic logic is always operating in the interstices, that is, between behind and around the crystallized moments of the discourse. In fact, like the reflexive

turn of the mind – in the sublime moment – back on the failure of its own machinery, Wordsworth too finds a principle of reason through which the subject is able to reconstitute itself: a principle of reason that was necessarily *always already* in operation. Wordsworth's metaphor, however, in describing the conditions of a single/particular conversational 'event', also slips into a description of a general/universal logic of the myth. The river as 'always already' flowing is precisely how we come to know Coleridge as talker. We only catch the river, as Wordsworth describes, already in motion: speaking itself over rocks and around obstacles. Indeed the origin of the river, which stands for the switch point I referenced between the myth as small scale social formation and larger cultural reputation, is put under erasure. We know the switch occurs, and yet we cannot formally locate it. And, of course ironically enough (and to complicate the idea of boundaries even more), Wordsworth's use of the river image is neither original for its description of an idea of the infinite, nor as a description of Coleridge's conversation. Locke introduces the concept of infinity as a river in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; and several other of Coleridge's contemporaries describe his conversation as river-like, such that 'river' becomes almost a byword for Coleridgean discourse.[91] What Mrs. Davy's passage illustrates, through its own reproduction of Wordsworth's metaphor, and further realizes through that metaphor's reproduction of materials circulating within popular discourse, is a picture structured like the Droste Cocao advertisement or the recursive logic of Schlegel's theory of fragment/work.

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[91] Seamus Perry offers a veritable index of accounts which use the metaphor of 'river' to describe Coleridge's conversation; see "Coleridge the Talker", 107-114.

The decentered effect of Mrs. Davy's passage is also the effect produced by TT. Indeed what I have been calling TT's aesthetic project is more appropriately an aesthetic ideology in an Althusserian sense – where ideology functions as the relative but unegotioable distance between the subject and the real. The largest ring in the series of concentric circles which constitutes TT and its various discursive contexts, is the literary marketplace. I argued earlier that TT was a commercial success. In fact, it was the fastest selling and most popular of the works of Coleridge's throughout the 19th Century and into the early 20th.[92] Contemporary reviewers often pointed out that TT seemed to call up the man in full. John Patterson, writing for the *Edinburgh Review* claims as much,

> The editor has acquitted himself in a manner highly creditable…he has endeavored to reduce to the form of aphorisms the sayings of one of the most eloquent, but least concise and definite reasoners and has extracted in this manner, in unconnected fragments, much which was evidently wrapt up in the texture of some fine-spun but continuous theory. (*TT* I:cii)

'Evidently' is the hinge of the passage, through which, fragments of conversation become functioning synecdoches for the man of the myth. And yet the *evidence*, as we have seen, is not to be found in TT nor in the contemporary descriptive sketches offered by Mrs. Davy and Wordsworth among others. It is an article of faith dressed as empirical. Only reason grasps what is evidently unavailable to the historical or contemporary understanding and installs itself as the basis for the knowledge of which it is also a product. I would argue that the 'fine-spun theory' serves as an unwittingly apt metaphor:

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[92] See appendix U in (*TT* II:498)

for the myth of Coleridge as talker and the talk as sublime excess is both the center and circumference of the recursive matrix of Coleridge's celebrity. Which is to say that TT's most powerful ideological function is to collapse the difference and distance between text and context, through its ceaseless logic of citationality, and in this sense it is truly decentering.

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III

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Coleridge's poem, 'Effusion XXXV Composed August 20th, 1795 at Clevedon, Somersetshire,' is more widely known as 'The Eolian Harp.' The latter is the poem's title in *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817 and in the *Poetical Works* which followed 11 years later in 1828. The shift in title cannot be said to have wrought any major structural change however, on the poem pretensions of 'spontaneity.' Indeed the changes to the body of the text, which follow the change in title in the 1817 printing, were submitted as eratta by Coleridge after the first editions had already been run off. They have been made famous by M.H. Abrams. In his essay, "Coleridge's 'A Light in Sound': Science, Metascience and Poetic Imagination" Abrams identifies the submission of eight lines which form an interstice between the first and second stanza (ll. 25-26),

> O! the one life within us and abroad,
>
> Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
>
> A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
>
> Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere –
>
> Methinks, it should have been impossible

Not to love all things in a world so fill'd

Where the breeze warbles and the mute still air

Is music slumbering on its instrument (*PW Variorum* I:115)

as instancing a dramatic turn in Coleridge's thinking.[93] Abrams cites the text *Aurora*,

written by the German mystic Jakob Bohme – a text which Coleridge mentions in a letter

to Ludwig Tiek marked July 4th 1817 – as the inspiration behind Coleridge's new

formulation of the ideas of syncretism and unity in thought and matter. I make use the

revised text because it has come to signify a metaphysical discourse which I believe

displaces the poem's focus on 'conversation.' Thus, as a small intervention, my reading

should provide a new purchase on the problematics of the representation of conversation

as it is undertaken in a work like TT. However, I also wish to maintain the poetry's

claims to effusion. I don't believe those claim are negated by reading its more widely

circulated 1817 text known as "Eolian Harp," but rather reformulated within the ideology

of conversation under consideration in this chapter. That is, "Effusion XXXV's" original

claims to its ex-tempore status were absolutely a fetishization of Coleridge's poetic

process, in fact the august date of composition which Coleridge gives the poem in its

published version does not even refer to a completed manuscript, the text which

Coleridge submitted to Cottle was most likely completed in February of 1796. However

that contextual gesture of naming the poem *effusion* – to which the form also lays claim –

becomes an even more acutely focused one, indeed is brought into even starker relief, by

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[93] M.H. Abrams, "Coleridge's 'A Light in Sound': Science, Metascience and Poetic Imagination," in <u>The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism</u> M.H. Abrams and Jack Stillinger eds. (New York: Norton, 1984), 158-191

the aesthetical aims of a volume like TT – aims to catch and mobilize the ephemera of Coleridge's conversation.

The poem begins with the intimation of conversation, an address to an auditor, Coleridge's fiancé Sarah Fricker, 'my pensive sara! Thy soft cheek reclin'd / thus on mine arm.'(ll.1-2) The picture is of auditorial intimacy, Sarah's cheek resting on Coleridge's arm illustrates that her ear is also in close enough proximity to hear the effusion which chanceably pours from his mouth. This is the first indication of the poem's effort to dissolve the paradox of transcription; Sarah's proximity over-comes the voyeuristic distance of the auditorial amanuensis which HNC played to *TT*'s composition. What's more, the first two lines, in scansion typical of blank verse, hang their meaning over the enjambment. The rhetorical effect mimics speech, such that the line literally inscribes itself as an utterance unfolding and understood only in time. The effect is reinforced as the moment not only registers to us, but to the auditor within the poem as, quite literally, a discursive syntax.

Coleridge continues to play effectively with enjambment, "most soothing sweet it is / to sit beside our cot, our cot o'er grown / with white-flower'd jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle, / (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love)"(ll.2-5) 'myrtle' and 'jasmin' are both references to *Paradise Lost*.[94] Coleridge's glossing of the natural surround as 'emblems' of 'innocence and love' is telling of the ideological nesting I identified as the operative principle of the myth of his reputation as talker. The line reference to Milton is from the prelapsarian period of Paradise Lost, "laurel and Mirtle, and what higher grew / of firm and fragrant leaf," being features of eden. However the

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[94] cf. ll. 690-700, John Milton, <u>Paradise Lost</u> ed. Gordon Tesekey (New York: Norton, 2005)

larger implication of the reference is to a kind of symbolic way of seeing. 'Our cot, our cot o'er grown' is also characteristic of the self generative power of language within this context; the cot is posited and then clarified, demonstrating the linguistic power of the mind to refine and recreate what in one moment was simply a cot and in the next is a cot overgrown, and then a cot overgrown with *jasmin* and *myrtle*. It is the same cot that Coleridge see's all along, and yet it continues to change as it is turned into grist for the critical mind.

Indeed Coleridge surveys the scene, Sara is present, and the Cot, which as we have seen is both the embodiment of human production and the production of the mind in the first moments of the poem, is nearly concealed/incorporated into the landscape. The bucolic atmosphere, however, cannot truly be said to be bucolic because the lines which follow reveal 'nature,' (the scene described) to be an aesthetic field, i.e. as an economy which must signify for us. Coleridge cannot help but see nature first mediated through Milton, that is, mediated through an edenic ideology. Indeed the flowers are thus not really flowers, but rather emblems of 'love' and 'innocence' meted out by Coleridge's symbolic visioning. In effect what the initial moments demonstrate is a way in which we see through text or consequently 'read' a landscape as necessarily, 'the image of…'. The problem of vision as envisioning is one opened up by Kant's split between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, a rupture which allows ideology to thus inhere in the space between the two and plant its roots deeply in the gap. It becomes the aesthetical subject's ('this subject Lute') impossible task to think its way outside of the *field* of representation. Indeed the task set by the poem's intitial title 'effusion XXXV' is to produce itself as a rupture in the visual economy of symbols which is the ground of the initial lines. In

effect the poem's desideratum is to deconstruct its own ideological way of seeing, to *be* epiphenomenal whispers in Sara's ear.

Coleridge then goes on to describe the rest of the surround. It is a muted atmosphere. The clouds are no longer 'rich with light' but rather *were* lambent, the star of eve (a reference to venus, often visible in northern latitudes in the summer evening sky) is only 'serenely brilliant' the still sea only murmurs and 'tells us of silence.' The presently *hush'd* economy, however, bears the traces of the brilliance it was once filled with, in effect demonstrating the power of the reasoning mind to grasp temporality as the decline of some original force. We might note that the rhetorical constructions here are also functions of narrative, that is, they impose and make sense of the scene as *telling* us something, something about a process. The features of the visual economy function like schlegalian fragments, each signifying ironically its expression of the larger aesthetic/temporal system of which it is a part. This is certainly not Coleridge's intention. Indeed as I mentioned his project is to avoid forcing nature into a significatory mode.

Coleridge finishes his preliminary survey with the paradoxical lines, "and the world *so* hush'd / the stilly murmur of the distant sea / tells us of silence."(ll.10-12) The lines which have built up to Coleridge's interpellation of a subject who is not solely auditor to the effusion, 'tells *us'* have been attempts to suppress the significatory capacity of nature. What the above lines demonstrate however, is that even 'silence' can signify, that is, as an absence. What does this mean for poetic language? Within the linguistic economy both words and their suppression *mean*. The poem in effect builds, in its

opening stanza, an inescapable structure of representation, from which it must extricate itself.

Suddenly the natural surround seems to be refigured as a world which cannot stop speaking, and the claims to the tranquility of mood seem only to be fetishizations of the uncomfortable fact that Coleridge has constructed for himself a sublime nightmare from which the poem must retreat. It is easy, in this context, to see why Coleridge gave up writing poetry, or at least professed to have done so. Words on the page are not fixed but rather grow out of control when they are mobilized for figural purposes. Coleridge's repeated emphasis of the disburdening nature of conversation should be understood, in this sense, as the effort to escape the tensions between writing and effacement.

Ignoring the errata submitted by Coleridge for a moment (because I would like to read it against the form of the poem, in effect as a coda) the remainder of the poem expends its energy turning the linguistically bound subject it first created, into the passive and malleable mind/instrument of which nature is the virtuosic player. And we read this procedure as the expression of Coleridge's desire to undo the operative and interpretive structures of thought/experience which mediate between the realms of the symbolic and the real – the latter inaccessible to the self-conscious subject, indeed only knowable as a distance from the former.

He continues,

And thus my love! As on the midway slope

Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon

Whilst through my half closed eyelids I behold

The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,

>And tranquil muse upon tranquility;
>
>Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
>
>And many idle flitting phantasies,
>
>Traverse my indolent and passive brain
>
>As wild and various, as the random gales
>
>That swell or flutter on this subject lute! (ll. 26-35)

The passive mind however is not quite something which Coleridge, as subject, can submit to. His claims to the 'subject lute' might be read as a disavowal of the various active processes of the mind upon the matter of nature. Indeed to 'behold the sunbeams dance' is to do more than observe, rather it is to attribute to them a particular kind of animation or motion with which our cognitive apparatus is capable of harmonizing. In effect the epistemology which holds sway over this stanza is the schlegalian concept of the system, that is, the notion of system as 'continual self-creating interchange'. However, the mind as an effusive channel swept over by 'one intellectual breeze' recalls the project of TT, which was to find value in every piece of Coleridge's talk, or at least mobilize the fragmentary status of each conversational entry into something of transparent value. As I argued, the volume does this by drawing on a range of preexisting discourses which make the case for its fragmentary value. The conversation, as it is reproduced in the volume is presented as something always underwritten by a single intellectual/discursive logic, or rather the talk is figured as merely representational of – in fragmentary form – a single intellectual breeze. Indeed the breeze which sweeps over the harps in the poem – which are certainly figures for Coleridge's mind – are also figures for his talk. Coleridge's harp/mind is also a mouth/harp with its literal breath of

conversation not only animating its contents but serving as their coherence or harmonizing principle as well.

The poem concludes with a figuration similar to the thought developed in the errata (which forces us to at least consider the poem, in its 1817 version, as performing is closure after the first stanza). I reproduce the poem's moment of closure alongside the errata here,

> Plastic and Vast, one intellectual breeze,
>
> At once the soul of each, and god of all?
>
> But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
>
> Darts, O beloved Woman! Nor such thoughts
>
> Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,
>
> And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
>
> Meek Daughter in the Family of Christ,
>
> Well hast thou said and holily disprais'd
>
> These shapings of the unregenerate mind,
>
> Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
>
> On vain philosophy's aye-babbling spring.
>
> For never guiltless may I speak of Him,
>
> Th' INCOMPREHENSIBLE! save with awe (ll. 39-49)

> O! the one life within us and abroad,
>
> Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
>
> A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,

Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere –

Methinks, it should have been impossible

Not to love all things in a world so fill'd

Where the breeze warbles and the mute still air

Is music slumbering on its instrument **(see Appendix)**

The lines remind us that the "soul of each," which can be glossed also as the kernel of

each conversational moment, are not only underwritten by the "god of all" or the

subtending logic of the entire discourse, but that this is the necessary fiction through

which a volume like TT can in effect be produced in the form of a compendium of

fragments. The effusion which mobilizes the discourse of fragmentation is also quite

literally a discourse in the poem. Coleridge's discovery of the operative principle of

which his effusion speaks, is something to which Sara plays witness. She offers here, a

look of 'mild reproof' of Coleridge's philosophic babble, literally here she sees the

conversational event which Coleridge describes and yet, we also remember that the initial

lines indicate, first and foremost, that she hears Coleridge's ventriloquisation/effusion of

the contents of the scene as well.

Indeed the final stanza calls up the picture which Coleridge bemoaned in the

notebooks, his ability simply to confound his auditors with the overwhelming force of the

'all' he happened to see in the image of the 'each' he spoke forth. Sara's effective

reproof does close the poem, calling Coleridge back from his conversational reverie to

the present moment of the scene to appreciate his surround and his time with her. And

yet if we read the submission of errata as coda to the form of the poem, rather than as

integrated within it, then we are able to see Coleridge's continued insistence upon the

unifying, imagistic logic of conversation which cannot simply enjoy an undifferentiated idea of nature and love for Sara. Rather it is a return to the recursive images of the first movement of the poem, this time figured more specifically as conversational. Indeed, "The one life within us and abroad / which meets all motion and becomes its soul / a light in sound a sound-like power in light…where the breeze warbles and the mute still air / is music slumbering on its instrument," demonstrates the way in which sound vibrates into meaning, and confirms the necessary fiction – which props up the ideology of value in and of conversation itself as pure form – where even the mute still air, or the words unsaid or ungrasped by the listener still indicate, indeed must indicate. *What*, what that form signifies is the question which remains unanswered and yet continues to produce the question which generates its recursive structure. The empty *what* is precisely the erased center at the bottom of the myth.

CONCLUSION

Whereto?

How to conclude a project whose theme has, in many senses, been the resistance to closure? I won't answer this question.

In my introduction I suggested that the practical aim of this thesis (its effort to read conversation back into the 'conversation poems') was, in its largest application, a pedagogical intervention. My own experience as a student of Romanticism lead to me reconsider the effects of certain modes and institutional structures of canonization – the growth industry of scholarly studies, editorial practices and anthologization, formal analysis and comparative analyses – which have shaped the reception of the poems I chose for my study. The thesis itself should serve as a program for a new pedagogy.

Conversation has functioned, across these chapters and through the discursive contexts I have been elucidating, as the tension between speech and writing. That tension is also, in one way or another, the thematic of each of the poems I read. While each poem can be said to undertake the task of un-writing itself, of endlessly struggling to efface the distance between speech and writing – and in this sense to always be in conversation with itself, the form speaking over and under the poetry's content – I have tried to demonstrate the historical/contextual motivations of the poems' deconstructive projects. While my considerations have been generic, they have also tried to negotiate a space in which each poem can both stand as its own instantiation of a conversational problematic, and as the articulation of a more general poetic practice which allows us to think of these poems in categorical terms. Like Coleridge's discourse itself, as I tried to show in my final chapter, there is a principle (always a train, a stream) which coheres my

project, expresses itself as the figure of the all (the whole thesis) in the expression of each (its chapters). That principle has been the thematic of conversation, and the formal tensions between speech and writing, form and content.

However, I am aware that a thorough contextualization in the mode of critically and textually oriented readings of *history*, is an overly ambitious project for any syllabus. Indeed it is a project which hinges on a simple problematic of quality vs. quantity, where the quality or depth of our reading suffers at the expense of the quantity of poems which we can claim for the field. On the microcosmic level the sacrifices of this pedagogical binary do not seem so urgent, however, as the dialectic teaches us, the two are immanently linked, i.e. one formal rubric equals several students who produce the kind of project I began, one hundred equals a generation of them.

Thus, to break down my project into digestible parts, I would say that "The Nightingale" can be understood in terms of its position within an historical moment of transition and translation. Roughly, that transition is delimited as the movement into modernity, in which antiquity is produced and reproduced as an fetish object, an object of curio which heals the gap between the sharp breaks of a generational notion of history. Because "The Nightingale," is situated directly in the midst of this shift, it unwittingly dramatizes the larger processes of transition which define its historical context. The poem fetishizes nature, producing a fictive bridge linking the past to the present (percy's figure of the minstrel) and yet, in as much as its thematic concern was to resist the consumption/commidifcation/reification narrative, its form still plays this process out through the consumption and reproduction of nature itself.

"Lime-Tree" performs a fetish of a different kind, its poetics are generated by the historical context of elocution, staged in the Bristol Political lectures of 1795. The lectures and the poem perform a fetish which I described as a 'turning away' and 'turning inward' in the service of reconstituting the subject. The loss or lack which engenders the turning away is both historical and psychodynamic. It is both the signification of the failures and resistances to Pantisocracy and the loss of Coleridge's love Mary Evans that force the fetishistic procedure of the lectures, while it is a structure of an always already implicit break in communication which construct the 'turning away' and the turning inward upon the very act of poeisis performed within the poem.

In my final chapter I tried to take the reputation of Coleridge as talker and deconstruct its representation in a work like the *Table Talk*. The reputation was, I suggested, the creation of a myth qua a story that, like most other thematics in this thesis, writes itself under erasure. While I argued that a text like TT produces its own context through an endless chain of signification – a recursive structure of reprentation; its editorial project and process were also shaped by a number of contemporary discourses of the sublime and of fragmentation. Those discourses are internally reproduced by TT: both structurally and, given that HNC simply went about transcribing the thinking of man deeply concerned with the features of these governing discourses, they are also reproduced within the content of the volume. I argued that this editorial practice accounts for the ironic relationship between the form and content of the project. While the poems I treated in my previous two chapters were produced by their contexts, I used Eolian harp here as a lens to study TT, a lens which I believe helped me unpack TT's procedures. So while those first two chapters were though alongt the axis of text and

context, where the former reproduces or negates the latter through its themes and argument, my final chapter carried to term the logical end of this struggle, that is, it became a study of how the two simply collapse into one another, it became a chapter about a text whose center is its circumference.

To complete the circular turn of thought I have just sketched as the formal procedure of my own project, let me go back to my introduction for a moment. There I suggested that the critical and methodological principle of this thesis – the reading of conversation back into the 'conversation poems' – was both motivated by interests of the present and concerns to restore to the poetry some force of its past. My hope is to have done this by throwing my criticism to the mercy of the future. The success with which I have done this, with which I have been able to make the 'conversation poems' generically signify 'conversation,' might be judged by my readers.

Appendix: The Poems

The Nightingale;
A Conversational Poem, Written in April, 1798[1]

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
Of sullen Light, no obscure trembling hues.
Come, we will rest on this old mossy Bridge!
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,   5
But hear no murmuring: it flows silently
O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still,
A balmy night! and tho' the stars be dim,
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find   10
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.
And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
"Most musical, most melancholy"[2] Bird!

A melancholy Bird? O idle thought!
In nature there is nothing melancholy.   15
—But some night-wandering Man, whose heart was pierc'd
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper or neglected love,
(And so, poor Wretch! fill'd all things with himself
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale   20
Of his own sorrows) he and such as he
First nam'd these notes a melancholy strain;
And many a poet echoes the conceit,
Poet, who hath been building up the rhyme[3]
When he had better far have stretch'd his limbs   25
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell
By sun or moonlight, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame   30
Should share in nature's immortality,
A venerable thing! and so his song
Should make all nature lovelier, and itself
Be lov'd, like nature!—But 'twill not be so;
And youths and maidens most poetical   35
Who lose the deep'ning twilights of the spring
In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.[4]
My Friend, and my Friend's Sister![5] we have learnt 40
A different lore: we may not thus profane
Nature's sweet voices always full of love
And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,   45
As he were fearful, that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music! And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge   50
Which the great lord inhabits not: and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.
But never elsewhere in one place I knew   55

So many Nightingales: and far and near
In wood and thicket over the wide grove
They answer and provoke each other's songs—
With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical and swift jug jug[6]   60
And one low piping sound more sweet than all—
Stirring the air with such an harmony,
That should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes,
Whose dewy leaflets are but half disclos'd,   65
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
Glistning, while many a glow-worm in the shade
Lights up her love-torch.

                    A most gentle maid
Who dwelleth in her hospitable home   70
Hard by the Castle, and at latest eve,
(Even like a Lady vow'd and dedicate
To something more than nature in the grove)
Glides thro' the pathways; she knows all their notes,
That gentle Maid! and oft, a moment's space,   75
What time the moon was lost behind a cloud,
Hath heard a pause of silence: till the Moon
Emerging, hath awaken'd earth and sky
With one sensation, and those wakeful Birds
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,   80
As if one quick and sudden Gale had swept
An hundred airy harps! And she hath watch'd
Many a Nightingale perch giddily
On blosmy[7] twig still swinging from the breeze,
And to that motion tune his wanton song,   85
Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head.

Farewell, O Warbler! till to-morrow eve,
And you, my friends! farewell, a short farewell!
We have been loitering long and pleasantly,
And now for our dear homes.—That strain again![8]   90
Full fain it would delay me!—My dear Babe,
Who, capable of no articulate sound,
Mars all things with his imitative lisp,
How he would place his hand beside his ear,
His little hand, the small forefinger up,   95
And bid us listen! And I deem it wise
To make him Nature's playmate. He knows well
The evening star: and once when he awoke
In most distressful mood (some inward pain

Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream)   100
I hurried with him to our orchard plot,
And he beholds the moon, and hush'd at once
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes that swam with undropt tears
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! Well—[9]
It is a father's tale. But if that Heaven   105
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up
Familiar with these songs, that with the night
He may associate Joy! Once more farewell,
Sweet Nightingale! once more, my friends! farewell.   110

This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,
A Poem,[1]

Addressed to Charles Lamb, of the India-House, London

ADVERTISEMENT.

In the June of 1797, some long-expected Friends paid a visit to the Author's Cottage; and on the morning of their arrival he met with an accident, which disabled him from walking during the whole time of their stay. One evening, when they had left him for a few hours, he composed the following lines, in the Garden Bower.

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Such beauties and such feelings, as had been
Most sweet to have remember'd, even when age
Had dimm'd my eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,   5
My friends, whom I may never meet again,

On springy[2] heath along the hill-top edge
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance
To that still roaring dell, of which I told;
The roaring dell,[3] o'erwooded, narrow, deep,   10
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
Where its slim trunk the Ash from rock to rock
Flings arching like a bridge; that branchless Ash
Unsunn'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still   15
Fann'd by the water-fall! And there my friends,
Behold the dark-green file of long lank weeds,
That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
Of the dim clay-stone.
            Now my friends emerge   20
Beneath the wide wide Heaven, and view again
The many-steepled track magnificent
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea
With some fair bark perhaps which lightly touches
The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two isles   25
Of purple shadow! Yes! they wander on
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad
My gentle-hearted CHARLES![4] for thou had'st pin'd
And hunger'd after nature many a year
In the great city pent, winning thy way   30
With sad yet patient soul, thro' evil and pain[5]
And strange calamity! Ah slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!

Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!   35
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue ocean!—So my Friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,[6]
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape,[7] gaze till all doth seem   40
Less gross than bodily, a living thing
Which *acts* upon the mind[8]—and with such hues
As cloath the Almighty Spirit, when he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.[9]
                              A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad   45
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower have I not mark'd
Much that has sooth'd me. Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see   50
The shadow of the leaf and stem above
Dappling its sunshine! And that Wallnut tree
Was richly ting'd; and a deep radiance lay
Full on the ancient Ivy which *usurps*
Those fronting elms, and now with blackest mass   55
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
Thro' the late Twilight: and tho' now the Bat
Wheels silent by, and not a Swallow twitters,
Yet still the solitary humble Bee,
Sings in the bean-flower! Henceforth I shall know   60
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure,
No scene so narrow but may well employ[1]
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to love and beauty! And sometimes
'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,   65
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.

My gentle-hearted CHARLES! when the last Rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing[2]   70
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in the light)
Had cross'd the mighty orb's dilated glory
While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still
Flew *creeking*[3] o'er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle-hearted CHARLES! to whom   75
No sound is dissonant, which tells of Life.

Effusion XXXV
Composed
August 20th, 1795,
at Clevedon, Somersetshire[1]

My pensive SARA! thy soft cheek reclin'd
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'er grown
With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,[2]
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)   5
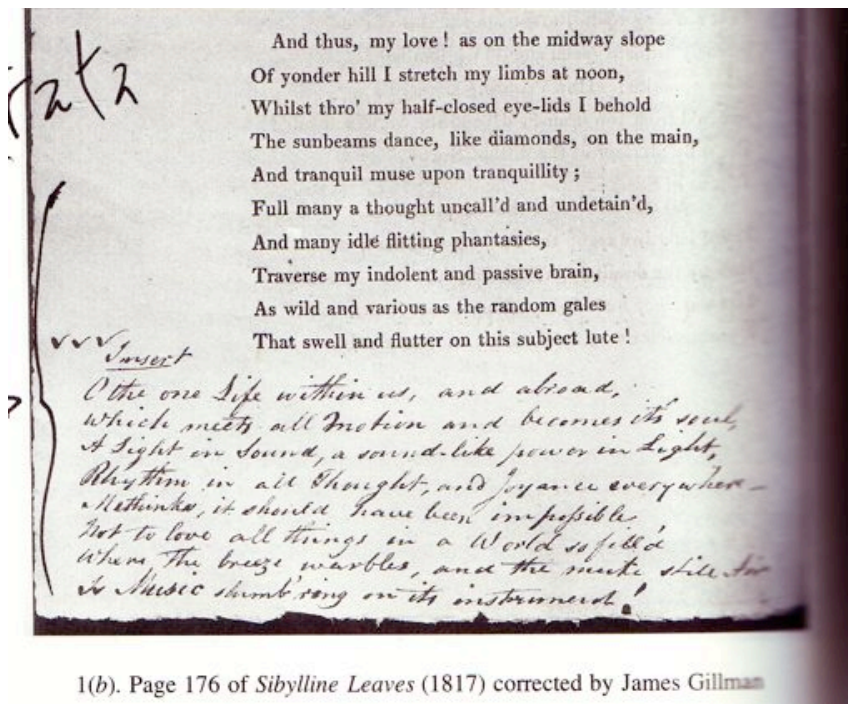And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,

Slow-sad'ning round, and mark the star of eve[3]
Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
Snatch'd from yon bean-field! and the world *so* hush'd!   10
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of Silence. And that simplest Lute[4]
Plac'd length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!
How by the desultory breeze caress'd,
Like some coy Maid half-yielding to her Lover,[5]   15
It pours such sweet upbraidings, as must needs
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now its strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound   20
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Faery Land,
Where *Melodies* round honey-dropping flowers
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause nor perch, hov'ring on untam'd wing.[6]   25

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon
Whilst thro' my half-clos'd eyelids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;   30
Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain
As wild and various, as the random gales
That swell or flutter on this subject Lute!   35
And what if all of animated nature

Be but organic Harps diversly fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?[7]   40
But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God.[8]

Meek Daughter in the Family of Christ,   45
Well hast thou said and holily disprais'd
These shapings of the unregenerate mind,
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.[9]
For never guiltless may I speak of Him,   50
Th' INCOMPREHENSIBLE! save when with awe[1]

Errata to the 1817 edition in Sibylline Leaves

And thus, my love! as on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst thro' my half-closed eye-lids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
As wild and various as the random gales
That swell and flutter on this subject lute!

Insert

O the one Life within us, and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in Sound, a sound-like power in Light,
Rhythm in all Thought, and Joyance every where—
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a World so fill'd
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still Air
Is Music slumb'ring on its instrument!

1(b). Page 176 of *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) corrected by James Gillman

Figures 1 and 2: Bristol Maps

Bristol and its surround

THE SITUATION OF BRISTOL
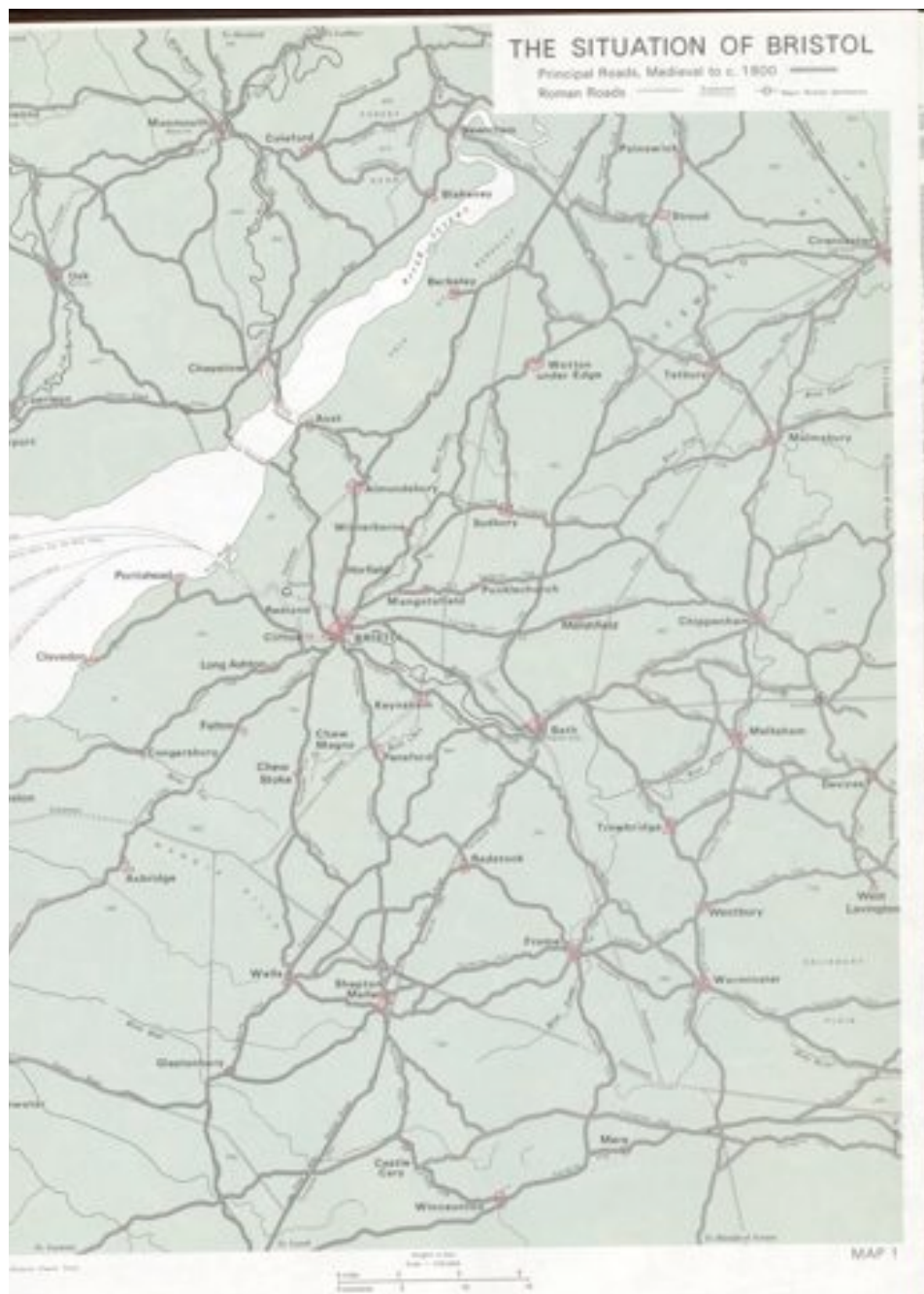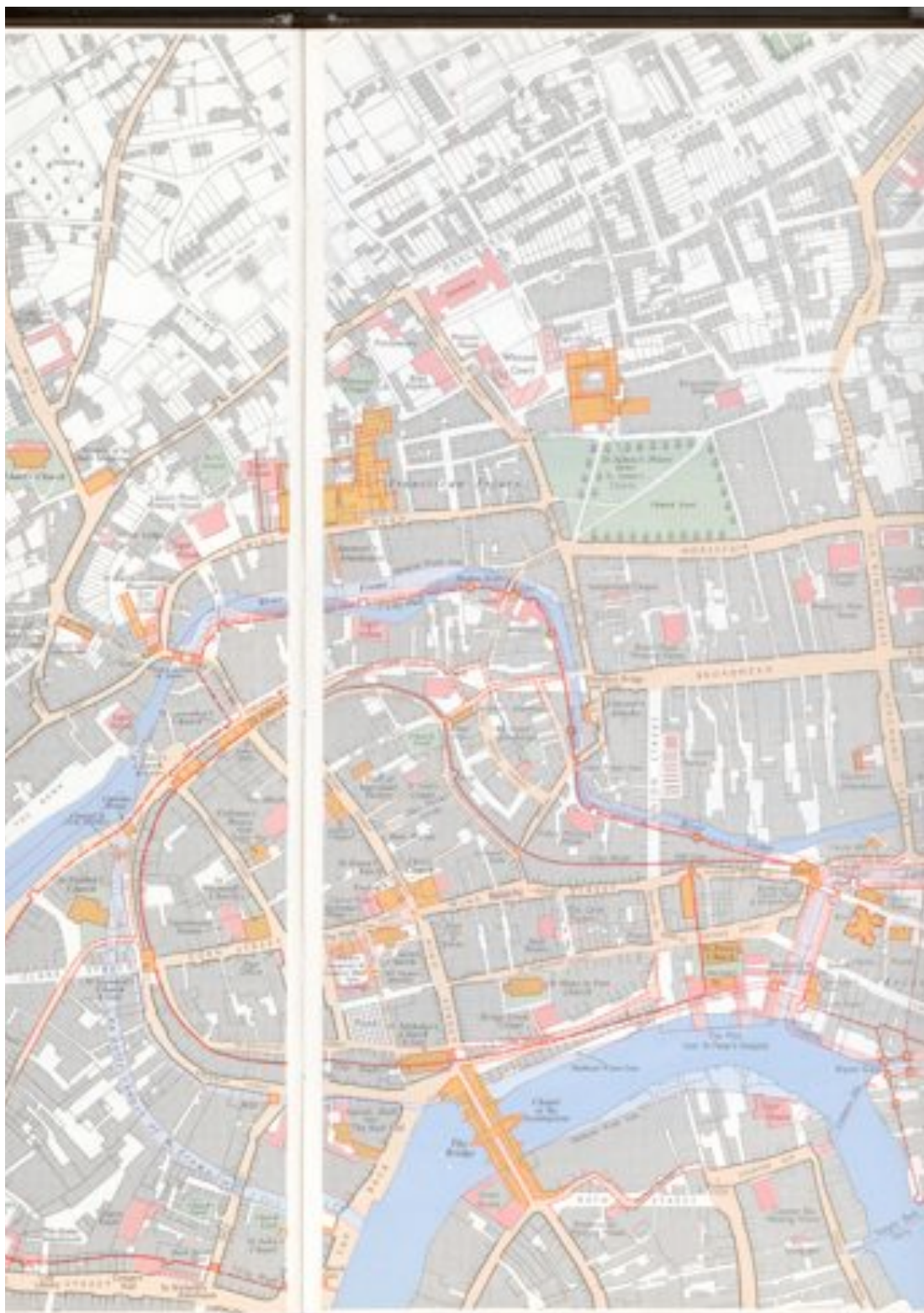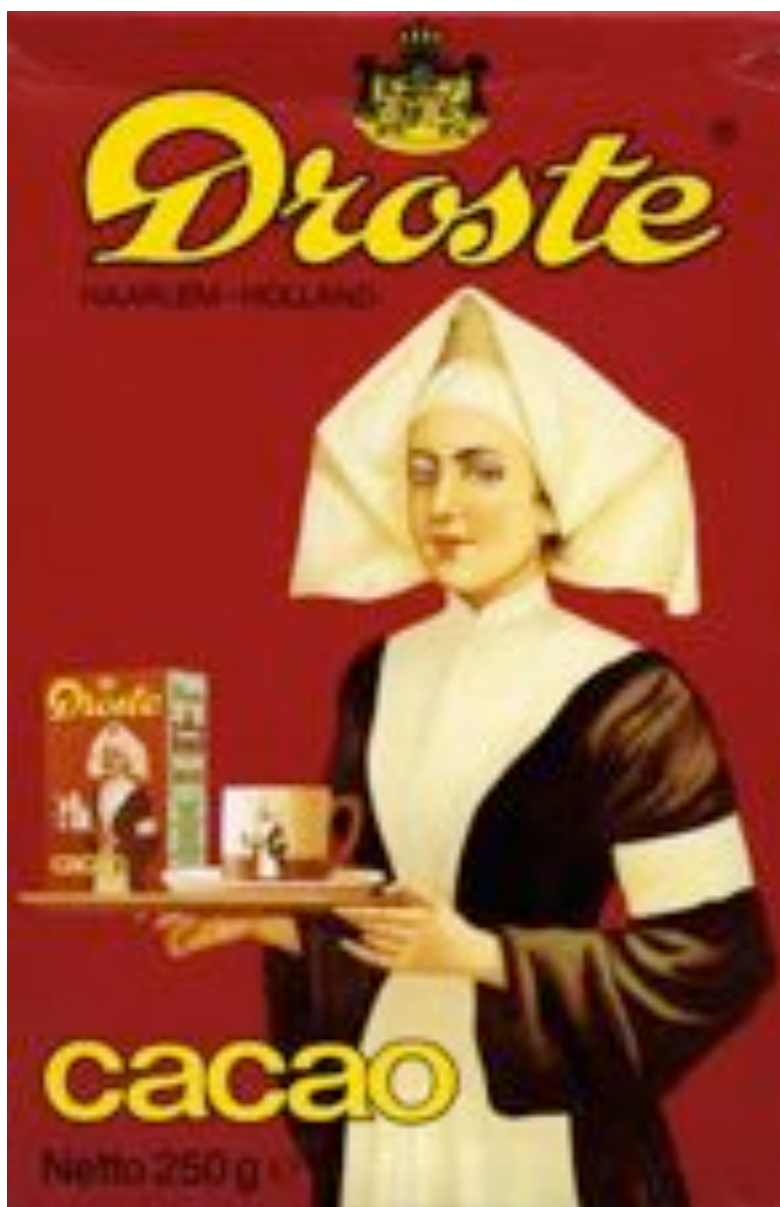
Urban Bristol and the Corn Market

Figure 3: Droste Cocoa 1904 Advertisement

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