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‘A living spectre of my Father dead’:
Hartley Coleridge, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Literary
Representation

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MOST ACCOUNTS of the relationship between Hartley Coleridge and his famous father, suggest that Hartley was unable to achieve a strong poetic identity because of STC’s overbearing shadow. At their most extreme, these interpretations perpetuate a myth that Hartley was a lesser version of STC—a drifting wanderer, constitutionally incapable of being grounded in the real physical world. Such readings argue that Hartley adopted a child-like persona to withdraw from the world and to fulfil STC’s celebration of Hartley’s childhood as an ideal state. Judith Plotz, for example, in *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, asserts that, both biographically and poetically, Hartley ‘stakes out the territory of the miniature, the youthful, and the minor’.¹ This analysis fails to address the full complexity of Hartley’s endeavour to realise his own authorial identity. The dialogue with STC in Hartley’s verse provides no evidence of an overriding Bloomian ‘anxiety of influence’. A closer examination of the four key poems which Hartley addresses to his father reveals that Hartley’s conflict was more with his public image than directly with STC; the strongest emotion in these poems was directed towards his readership and their inability to differentiate between a poet’s public and private identity.

In ‘Dedicatory Sonnet to S.T. Coleridge’, which formed the introductory poem to Hartley’s 1833 *Poems, Songs, and Sonnets*, Hartley heralds STC as the enabling influence and inspiration of his authorial life: ‘Father, and Bard revered! to whom I owe, / Whate’er it be, my little art of numbers’.² Though Hartley miniaturises his own ‘little art’, this poem, in reply to STC’s ‘Frost at Midnight’, also gives thanks for the creation of his poetic identity. He alludes to the infant self depicted by STC in ‘Frost at Midnight’ and declares that his father’s prophecy came true:

The prayer was heard: I ‘wander’d like a breeze’,
By mountain brooks and solitary meres,
And gather’d there the shapes and phantasies
Which, mixt with passions of my sadder years,
Compose this book.

(CPW 2, ll. 9-13)

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¹ Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 205.

² ‘Dedicatory Sonnet to S.T. Coleridge’, ll. 1-2, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Hartley Coleridge*, ed. Ramsay Colles (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1908), 2. All further references to Hartley’s poems will be to this edition, abbreviated to CPW, unless otherwise stated.

Hartley asserts a positive interpretation of the ‘wandering’ label that has so often been attached to him by stating that it is exactly this sense of rootlessness which allowed him to ‘gather’ the shapes of his verse; but, crucially, he points out that he did not remain a child, and so added ‘the passions of [his] sadder years’ to the intuitions of the infant babe. A great proportion of Hartley’s nature verse illustrates his identification with the necessity and validity of peripatetic and transitory modes of existence—this is a fundamental Hartleyan characteristic. In these poems a drifting, aimless, apparently whimsical existence is frequently presented as an imaginative positive. For example, in ‘Let me not deem that I was made in vain’, through a close analysis of the interrelationship between the insect, the violet, and the sun, Hartley shows how the presence of all life is noticed by something, which, therefore, signifies its relevance and meaning in the larger scheme of creation:

The very shadow of an insect’s wing,
For which the violet cared not while it stay’d,
Yet felt the lighter for its vanishing,
Proved that the sun was shining by its shade: [...]

(112, ll. 9-12)³

The movements of the insect affect and actualize the relationship between the violet and the sun; thus this seemingly insignificant creature is shown to be a mediator of the driving force of all creation.

STC hoped that Hartley would enjoy the freedom of nature, rather than suffering the claustrophobia of the city which he had endured as a child ‘pent ’mid Cloisters dim’. However, in the third poem of Hartley’s ‘To a friend’ series, Hartley depicts STC’s forecast as illusory and misguided: Hartley refers to his life’s course as a ‘lazy brook’, which ‘close pent up within [his] native dell’, ‘crept along from nook to shady nook’ (CPW 4, ll. 9, 10, 11). Here, Hartley corrects his father, arguing that the native dell might also hold a life ‘pent’: deprived of human companionship. For Hartley, psychic freedom occupies a third space that is not dependent on environment: without connection, the countryside becomes just as much of a mental prison to Hartley as the city was to STC. Critics have often seen within ‘Frost at Midnight’ a prophecy of Hartley’s predilection for disappearing and wandering, a tendency which first manifested itself after his exclusion from Oxford: in 1820 his fellowship at Oriel College was not renewed due to grossly exaggerated accusations of ‘intemperance’ and ‘keeping low company’. But in a brief footnote to Hartley’s ‘Dedicatory Sonnet’, and specifically with regard to the ‘Frost at Midnight’ ‘thou, my babe!’ prophecy, Hartley attempts to disassociate his fate from his father’s poem:

³ Hartley’s ‘drop of the eternal spring’ in ‘Let me not deem that I was made in vain’ is also most likely inspired by Wordsworth’s dew-drop motif which figures in an epigram in Rotha’s book, written in July 1834: ‘The Daisy, by the shadow that it casts, / Protects the lingering Dew-drop from the Sun’, WLMS 11/57-60/57.25.

As far as regards the *habitats* of my childhood, these lines, written at Nether Stowey, were almost prophetic. But poets are *not* prophets.⁴

While Hartley did become the child of nature that STC hoped for, we must not assume, Hartley asserts, that he was either ‘written’ into being by his father, nor that he succumbed to a usurpation of his own independently managed growth (as opposed to his textual construction). Hartley emphatically declares that he will *not* allow his future and fate to be determined by a myth.

Far from being creatively stifled by his father’s poetic presence, Hartley repeatedly indicates that, as *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* concludes, ‘as a poet, [he] did, in fact, gain more than he lost by his infirmity’ of being the son of STC.⁵ In a letter to his brother Derwent written after their father’s death, Hartley confesses that a tremendous amount of his motivation and identity as a writer sprang from the desire for his father’s approval: ‘I shall [...] soon put forth a second volume;’ Hartley writes, ‘though half, more than half, the pleasure I expected from its publication is departed.’⁶ The poems Hartley subsequently wrote on or to STC after his death reveal a growing conflict of identities as Hartley consistently asserts his difference from his father in his continued attempt to disentangle his selfhood from his father’s imagined version of Hartley’s being. In this series of poems, STC is the constant imaginary interlocutor.

The sonnet ‘Coleridge the Poet’ was intended to form part of an essay by Hartley to prefix a new edition of STC’s *Biographia Literaria*.⁷ In his letters from October 1836 until January 1846 Hartley speaks of this essay as being near completion repeatedly, but this edition of *Biographia* was finally published in 1847 without his essay. The version of Hartley’s sonnet that Derwent eventually publishes in 1851 reveals Hartley’s trepidation over the formidable task of representing his father in print:

[...] how shall I dare
Thy perfect and immortal self to paint?
Less awful task to ‘draw empyreal air’.

(CPW 111, ll. 12-14).⁸

The phrase ‘draw empyreal air’ echoes STC’s *Religious Musings*—‘Soaring aloft I breathe the empyreal air / Of Love, omnific, omnipresent Love’ (ll. 414-15). Thus Hartley implies that the task of representing his father—and of literary

⁴ Hartley Coleridge, *Poems, Songs and Sonnets* (Leeds: F. E. Bingley, 1833), 145n.

⁵ Anon, ‘Hartley Coleridge’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 18 (1851): 267.

⁶ *Letters of Hartley Coleridge*, ed. Grace Evelyn Griggs and Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 164. Hereafter abbreviated as LHC.

⁷ For fragments of this essay see Earl Leslie Griggs, ‘Hartley Coleridge on his Father’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* XLVI (December 1931): 1246-52.

⁸ A considerably different version of this sonnet is included in a letter to Hartley’s mother, dated October 1836 (LHC 198). Both versions profess Hartley’s anxiety over the awesome task of having to represent his father in print, but the version that Derwent chooses to publish, especially the final four lines, expresses Hartley’s sense of his own inferiority more explicitly than the sonnet which Hartley sends to his mother.

representation itself—is more complex than even STC’s poetic composition; an indication that he is not overawed by his father’s poetry.⁹ In this, as in many of his poems, Hartley ponders his father’s identity and his own simultaneously. Though Hartley finds himself ‘unequal to the task’ of literary representation, his letters from 1836-46 reveal that his resistance springs not from a sense of filial inferiority, but from his reluctance to submit to an undertaking where he feared absolute integrity of representation was impossible.¹⁰ In a letter to Henry Nelson Coleridge, dated 27 March 1837, Hartley cites the impossibility of representing Coleridge, the *whole* man, as his primary obstacle: ‘My dear Father’s greatness is not only too large for my comprehension, but in some parts too high for my apprehension—not that I cannot understand him, but I cannot realize many of his ideas’ (LHC 210). Hartley had spoken of William Wordsworth in an almost identical fashion in 1833 when the *Quarterly* accused him of an ‘overweening worship’ of Wordsworth—Hartley defended himself by stating simply ‘no man but himself could *realize his ideas*’ (LHC 157, my italics). Hartley is extremely reluctant to be seen to be speaking for his father, so central is faithful representation to his own literary endeavour. Ironically, Hartley, who has fallen victim to sustained literary misrepresentations, worries that by trying to elucidate his father’s reputation he will distort him.¹¹

The literary and personal protectiveness that Hartley directs towards STC is developed into a larger meditation on the different facets of identity and representation in the poem ‘Written on the Anniversary of our Father’s Death’, composed in 1847, thirteen years after STC’s had died.¹² This poem alternates between the world perspective of STC—with phrases such as ‘Still for the world he lives, and lives in bliss’; and, ‘The Sage, the poet, lives for all mankind’—and Hartley’s private perspective:

...Ten years and three
Have now elapsed since he was dead to me

⁹ The phrase ‘draw empyreal air’ might also be an allusion to a poem entitled ‘To the Rev. Coplestone’, which refers to one of Hartley’s contemporaries at Oxford: see Richard Mant’s ‘To the Rev. Coplestone’ (1806): ‘And he, who durst from earth aspire / Into the heav’n of heav’ns, and *draw empyreal air*’ (15-16, my italics). Edward Coplestone was the Provost of Oriel from 1815-28, where Hartley was elected a fellow in 1819, and was largely responsible for determining not to renew Hartley’s fellowship at Oriel. For letters concerning Dr. Coplestone and the Oriel affair see LHC 22, 32, 34, 35, 36, 41, 49, 50, 53, 54, 301, 319, 323. Richard Mant was a fellow of Oriel from 1798-1804. The phrase ‘empyreal air’ also figures in William’s *The Excursion*, Bk Fourth, l. 231.

¹⁰ In a letter to John Taylor Coleridge (October 1836) Hartley confesses: I should not shrink from the task, were [it only] my father’s character as a poet, a Critic, and in general a literateur [...] but I am hardly capable of arguing his philosophy at present. Indeed my opinion is that no view of it should be attempted, till his remarks are all before the public’ (LHC 198).

¹¹ Hartley summarises the vast discrepancy between the representative written word and actuality when discussing his father’s conversational powers in his introduction to *The Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford* (London: Edward Moxon, 1839), xliv. In reference to one of his father’s lectures, Hartley writes: ‘My revered father in a lecture which I shall never forget, [spoke] with an eloquence of which the Notes published in his Remains convey as imperfect an impression as the score of Handel’s Messiah upon paper compared to the Messiah sounding in multitudinous unison of voices and instruments beneath the high embowered roof of some hallowed Minster’.

¹² Hartley’s early awareness of the nuances of identity was recorded by STC in a letter to Dorothy Wordsworth on 9 February: ‘[Hartley] pointed out without difficulty that there might be five Hartleys, Real Hartley, Shadow Hartley, Picture Hartley, Looking Glass Hartley, and Echo Hartley’ (CL II 673).

And all that were on earth intensely his.

(CPW 139, ll. 1, 9, 2-4)

In this way, Hartley identifies the essential disjunction between artistic immortality and human mortality. Moreover, he narrates the fault-lines resultant from living in the shadow of—and grieving for—a father who was, and remains, a poet; Hartley's implication is that STC's still palpable poetic legacy creates an obstacle to both the acceptance of his personal loss, and the growth of his own public identity. It is also the magnitude of STC's public identity during Hartley's life that generates conflict within Hartley: because STC was predominantly absent as a father, Hartley is engaging with an insubstantial father-figure who is more poet than father. Just as STC creates the myth of the child-hartley, so too does STC appear shadowy and imaginative as a literal paternal presence, receded and usurped by his more dominant public persona.

The poem 'Anniversary' ends with a call for privacy delivered with an implicit attack on both the public, and his father—it is the only published poem to direct blame overtly at STC: 'Yet can I not but mourn because he died / That was my father, should have been my guide' (CPW 139, ll. 13-14).¹³ There are many indications from the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle that Hartley lacked support and guidance during his life. In Derwent's *Memoir* of his brother, Derwent concedes that Hartley's sensitive disposition needed and deserved more careful parental attention: 'He was not made to go alone; he was helped through life as it was: perhaps, under altered circumstances, he might have been helped more'.¹⁴ Dorothy Wordsworth identified Hartley's behaviour with STC's neglect: '[STC] ought to come to see after Hartley', she writes, 'for his oddities increase daily, and he wants other discipline'.¹⁵ Furthermore, in April 1814, William Wordsworth criticises STC's inability to look the matter of Hartley's education 'fairly in the face' (LWDW III 145).¹⁶ It was only after STC's death that Hartley committed to print the neglect that he felt.¹⁷ It is likely that the loss of his father in the year after the publication of Hartley's first volume intensified his vulnerability: first his 'darling effusions'

¹³ In a letter written to his father in September 1820, Hartley indicates a strong desire for guidance whilst he was at Oxford: 'I was placed, by no choice of my own, in a college not famous for sobriety or regularity, without acquaintance with the world, without introductions, and after the first term, without any to guide or caution me' (CL V 61).

¹⁴ *Poems by Hartley Coleridge with a Memoir of His Life by his Brother*, ed. Derwent Coleridge, 2 vols. (London: E. Moxon, 1851), clxii. STC recognised this neglect of his children to some extent: see CL II 767 and CL III 61, where he thinks of his children as orphans.

¹⁵ *The letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, arranged and edited by the late Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Alan G. Hill, Mary Moorman and Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967-1988), vol. III, 124. Hereafter abbreviated as LWDW.

¹⁶ STC left his children largely in the care of their mother, Robert Southey, and the Wordsworths. It was ultimately contributions from Southey, William Wordsworth, and Lady Beaumont which funded Hartley's university education.

¹⁷ Dorothy Wordsworth's perception, however, indicates that Hartley was aware of his paternal neglect from a very early age. She writes on 5 January 1805 (when Hartley was eight): 'Dear little creature! He said to me this morning on seeing Johnny cry after his Father who was going to take a walk "If he had the sense to know where my father is he would not cry when his is going such a little way"' (LWDW I 526).

had, as Hartley puts it, ‘throw[n] off their nursery-attire of manuscript’ and become exposed to the public, thus losing their exclusive guardianship and protection; and then he too became detached from his grounding source and creator.¹⁸ Hartley makes clear that he was floundering for lack of guidance in this pivotal 1833-4 period, which saw the birth of his poetry and the death of his father.

Hartley’s frustration at the popular tendency to merge the poet’s public and private life, and his keen awareness of the fragility of his own literary reputation, is clarified in a key letter to his mother, dated November 1836, two years after STC’s death, where Hartley defends his own character confidently:

[...] it is very cruel in people whom I never injured to publish my father’s natural complaints of my delinquencies to the million whom they concern not—still worse to promulgate what can do no credit either to the living or to the dead, and must convey very false impressions to the public, (What the Devil have the public to do with it?)
(LHC 203).

Hartley is referring to Thomas Allsop’s *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*, which included personal references to Hartley and Derwent.¹⁹ Hartley’s humiliation at Allsop’s insensitive exposure—published in 1835-6, the period when Hartley was planning to publish his second volume of poems—most likely contributed to his mounting reluctance to publish his verse again.

Hartley’s poem ‘Full well I know’, which remained unpublished until 1929, epitomises the familial association that has blighted his public perception, which increasingly classified him as a relic of his deceased father. Hartley recognises some family traits of his father in himself—both became homeless, orphaned wanderers, without constant career, and detached further from the world through addiction to opium or alcohol—but I am arguing that biographical similarities have been overplayed and have overshadowed and distorted readings of Hartley’s verse. ‘Full well I know’ forms a desperate plea for all that *he* has endeavoured to achieve to be recognised.²⁰ Importantly,

¹⁸ *Hartley Coleridge, Essays and Marginalia*, ed. Derwent Coleridge, vol. I (London: E. Moxon, 1851), 86. Hereafter abbreviated as EM.

¹⁹ Allsop’s *Letters* was criticised also by Wordsworth: ‘The Editor is a man without judgement, and therefore appears to be without feeling’ (LWDW VI 148); and Edward Moxon: ‘He is a very amiable Man, but sadly deficient in tact as an Editor’ (LWDW VI 148n). William Wordsworth supported the view that exposures such as Allsop’s were injurious to those closest to the deceased poet: ‘The distinction also has escaped his sagacity and ever will escape those of far superior talents to Mr A. who care not what offence or pain they give to living persons provided they have come to a conclusion, however inconsiderately, that they are doing justice to the dead’ (LWDW VI 148). William had expressed a similar belief over both Allsop’s publication and Henry Nelson Coleridge’s already published *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* in a letter to Edward Moxon in December 1835: ‘it gives me great pain to learn that any such publication [Allsop’s] is so *speedily* intended: the mischief which I am certain will in many ways accompany the work, will not be obviated, or even abated, by suppressing names’ (LWDW VI 134).

²⁰ ‘Full Well I know’ was first published in 1929 in Griggs’s biography *Hartley Coleridge: His Life and Work* (London: University of London Press, 1929).

Hartley stresses that it is an *external* perception ('ye look on me')²¹ which finds him to be derivative and dependent—merely 'A living spectre of [his] Father dead'. Hartley is surely referring to this poem's self-portrayal, together with William's representation of him in 'To H. C., Six Years Old', when he writes: 'Some writers maintain a sort of dubious, twilight existence from their connection with others of greater name' (EM II 109-10).²²

The abiding image of the dependent and fragile leaf in 'Full well I know' represents the precariousness of identity and its symbiotic nature: while the tree eclipses our perception of the leaf's independence, the leaf only flourishes whilst attached to the tree. Likewise, Hartley feels his identity has been perceived exclusively through another (STC), and his poetic output misjudged as a consequence:

Had I not borne his name, had I not fed
On him, as one leaf trembling on a tree,
A woeful waste had been my minstrelsy—

(NP 69, ll. 3-5)

Here Hartley gives thanks for his Coleridge name and connection, believing that without such a bond, however precarious, his 'minstrelsy' would have been entirely squandered. But Hartley alludes to the state of inescapable fragility that his paternal relationship condemns him to in his use of the word 'tremble' both to express paternal connection, as here, and also separation: as he writes elsewhere, 'what but for him I might have been, I tremble to think' (LHC 163).

The tree or tree-leaf motif is significant. It recurs throughout STC's notebooks and letters, most notably when STC figures himself as an oak tree, a pre-occupation which has clearly influenced Hartley.²³ In a poem written to his sister, Sara, in April 1835, Hartley represents their family as an 'old and thunder-stricken tree' depicting the remaining siblings as 'A few leaves clinging to the age-warp'd boughs'. Once again, Hartley identifies himself as the isolated, most vulnerable leaf, 'High in a bare and solitary branch': 'one poor leaf, that ventures to put forth / In the chill aspect of the boisterous north' (LHC 169); an image which recalls the struggling leaf in STC's *Christabel*, where 'There is not wind enough to twirl / The one red leaf, the last of its clan' (ll.

²¹ Hartley Coleridge, *New Poems: Including a Selection from his Published Poetry*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 69, ll. 1, 2. Hereafter abbreviated as NP. Similarly, 'I have been cherish'd, and forgiven' suggests that Hartley has been pitied only for his father's sake: 'Twas for the sake of one in Heaven / Of him that is departed' (NP 93, ll. 3-4).

²² In a characteristic moment of modesty, Hartley goes on to predict, on 27 November 1843, that he will only be remembered for his literary affiliations: 'If aught of mine be preserved from oblivion, it will be owing to my bearing the name of Coleridge and having enjoyed, I fear with less profit than I ought, the acquaintance of Southey and of Wordsworth' (EM II, 109-10).

²³ A striking tree reference in STC's notebooks occurs in May 1803 when he figures the discrepancy between his 'strength' and his actual 'power' by likening himself to an 'Annual, or Biennial, which grows nearly as high and spreads as large, as the Oak – but the *wood*, the *heart* of Oak, is wanting' (CN III 3324).

48-52). The 'boisterous north' which threatens to detach Hartley's leaf could represent the public domain, which is inhospitable, yet also offers liberation from that which secures and limits the leaf's experience.²⁴ Hartley's combat with the external environment—and thus with the public—appears courageous, chosen, and determined: he 'ventures to put forth'. We can see, then, that the trembling leaf-tree motif is used to figure Hartley's fluctuating and ambiguous understanding of his paternal relationship, which is characterised alternately by dependence, represented by the clinging leaf, and independent survival, as imaged by the leaf battling with the external elements. In this way, Hartley's tenuous existence parallels the relationship between STC and the quivering but persistent film of flame in 'Frost at Midnight', the 'sole unquiet thing', within which STC finds 'a companionable form': 'Only that film, which fluttered on the grate, / Still flutters there (ll. 15-16).

STC also repeatedly identifies the infant Hartley with an isolated leaf in his 1800-1801 letters. Hartley is 'a spirit that dances on an aspen leaf'; 'all Health and extacy—He is a Spirit dancing on an aspen Leaf'; 'a fairy elf—all life, all motion—indefatigable in joy—a spirit of joy dancing on an Aspen Leaf' (CL I, 612, 615; II 667-8). This association isolates the trembling leaf image—and Hartley—from its grounding source, leaving it free-floating and independent. Similarly, in a letter to Thomas Poole, dated October 1803, STC presents the seven-year-old Hartley as an 'utter Visionary! like the Moon among thin clouds, he moves in a circle of Light of his own making—he alone, in a Light of his own' (CL II, 1014). Judith Plotz points out that by presenting such images of apparent natural independence, STC represented Hartley as 'virtually autonomous, as one whose self-sufficiency needed no others' (Plotz 2001, 223). But STC's notebooks record how the baby Hartley did not, in fact, have a 'light of his own making': like a normal growing child, Hartley would beg for candles at night to cure his nightmares—what he calls 'the *Seems*'—yet STC remains coolly detached from the reality of Hartley's childhood experience (CN I 1253).²⁵ It could be, then, that with this enduring trembling leaf motif Hartley is reproaching STC for his misguided inattentiveness—'That was my father, should have been my guide' (CPW 139, l.14).²⁶

Most importantly, in the poem 'Full well I know', Hartley is striving to say 'look at what *I* have done':

²⁴ See also 'A frail dependent of the fickle sky' (CPW 114, l. 4).

²⁵ The full notebook entry, dated October 1802, reads: 'Hartley at Mr. Clarkson's sent for a Candle – the *Seems* made him miserable—what do you mean, my Love! —The *Seems*—the *Seems*—what seems to be & is not—Figures [scored through] Men & faces & I do not [know] what, ugly, & sometimes pretty & then turn ugly, & they seem when my eyes are, open, & worse when they are shut—& the Candle cures the *SEEMS*' (CN I 1253).

²⁶ Though Hartley is reproaching STC for parental neglect, interestingly it seems STC was far more attentive to his daughter's needs. Sara Coleridge's apprehension of her father, as detailed in a letter to her daughter, September 1851, portrays a much more caring and sensitive STC. While Sara explains that neither her mother nor Southey fully understood her 'night-fears', her father was entirely sympathetic: 'My Uncle Southey laughed heartily at my agonies. I mean at the cause. He did not enter into the agonies. Even mamma scolded me for creeping out of bed [...]. But my father understood the case better. He insisted that a lighted candle should be left in my room [...]. From that time forth my sufferings ceased'. See *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, ed. Edith Coleridge (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 49.

Yet I have sung of maidens newly wed
 And I have wished that hearts too sharply bled
 Should throb with less of pain, and heave more free
 By my endeavour.

(NP 69, ll. 6-9)

Hartley is reminding us of his own poetic manifesto which prefaced his 1833 *Poems* in the form of the epigraph to this volume. The epigraph is taken from Chaucer's *Troilus and Creseide*, and likewise asserts that the author's intention is to alleviate the sufferings of love. In short, Hartley declares that his central authorial aim was to celebrate the pleasures and pains of life and for his poetry to exist as a very real and active social force that could provide solace and liberty (he wishes his readers' hearts to 'heave more free'). Hartley thus shares Keats's foregrounding of 'the great end / Of poesy': 'that it should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man' ('Sleep and Poetry', ll. 245-6).

In the poem 'Followed by Another'—written in the final year of his life—Hartley indicates that his inability to submit another volume of poetry to print was because this fundamental ministry of care which drove his poetic agency was being ignored: he talks of losing 'aim', 'hope', desire, and ultimately resigning his 'unregarded ministry' (NP 87, ll. 5, 6, 9). He thus becomes aligned with the silent and independent service of the frost in 'Frost at Midnight', which 'performs its secret ministry / Unhelped by any wind' (ll. 1-2). In this manner, Hartley places the blame for any alleged under-achievement onto the public rather than admitting to an inherent personal failing. A letter by his sister Sara written a year prior to 'Followed by Another' supports the view that Hartley's unique situation affected his ability to put himself before the public:

[...] the sense that his situation is peculiar produces in him a sort of touchiness. Were I near him I might do him good in many ways—& perhaps might as it were enforce the collection of his poems, & induce him in one way or another to publish again.²⁷

The debasing self-portrayal in 'Full well I know' suggests a self-deprecation that Hartley has been driven into; an ironic admission of his insignificance. Though he demeans his intelligence by labelling it a 'penny-worth of wit', he believes himself to be more than he is portrayed: by comparing his life to a 'wheel of fortune' Hartley sardonically criticises the absurdity of life, suggesting and lamenting, as he frequently does in his verse, that life is a gamble, and success dependent on circumstance and chance (NP 87, ll. 11-12). Hartley points to the exposure and degradation he has endured in his authorial life and

²⁷ Sara's letter is addressed to Mary Stanger, dated 31 May 1847. WLMS 55/1/53. In a letter that Sara writes after Hartley's death she admits that one of the greatest regrets of her life was that her own family obligations prevented her from being in a position to help Hartley more.

implies that any further publicity would be intellectually humiliating and pointless. In this late poem, Hartley sees with startling clarity that he can only achieve recognition by playing into his alternative, and irritatingly persistent, identity as ‘A living spectre of [his] Father dead’.

The final couplet of ‘Full well I know’ continues the central theme of these poems written on or to STC—the disjunction between public and private identity—and levels a bitter attack at the public and their presumptive attempts to ‘know’ and possess the poet: ‘You love me for my sire, *to you unknown*’ (NP 87, l. 13; my italics). Most importantly, ‘Full well I know’ critiques the incongruity of public perception and private authorial endeavour. Hartley argues that idolatry and immortality of the poet-father cannot preclude the development of the poet-son, but certainly impedes public recognition of his independence. Hartley is asking for a moratorium on the traditional reception of STC—implicit in his continual assertion that the public cannot truly know his father—in order that a true connection can be achieved with his own self and work—a counter-measure which he implores in the poem’s final line: ‘Revere me for his sake, and love me for my own’ (NP 87, l. 14).

Judith Plotz states that ‘The Hartley constructed by Coleridge and Wordsworth has proved metaphorically irresistible to the readers of Romantic poetry as it proved literally irresistible to Hartley himself’ (Plotz 2001, 250). I have argued that the latter part of this view is a misreading of Hartley’s work. Hartley does *not* accept his father’s definition of him—far from being passively written into being, writing was central to his identity and agency; as he professed in a letter to his mother: ‘I am nothing without the pen’ (LHC 269).²⁸ A long tradition of Coleridgean criticism has found the mythical construction of Hartley as an elfin, child-like figure, ‘metaphorically irresistible’; Hartley himself consistently rejected this myth, and always sought to be read as an independent adult.

²⁸ Hartley continues with characteristic modesty: ‘and but little, I fear, with it’ (LHC 269).