

Silence and the Pantheistic Sublime in Coleridge's Early Poetry

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All mankind, whose common sense is not diverted by system, will agree, that darkness, solitude, and silence, naturally oppress the mind by a tremendous and sublime sensation.¹

Silence plays an intriguing role in eighteenth century accounts of the sublime. It is often present in lists of sublime objects, typically (as in Burke) associated with the other privations—darkness, solitude etc.² In the course of the century there was a huge variety of increasingly intricate speculations on the sublime, leaving behind their Longinian origins in rhetoric and variously becoming subjectivized, more clearly defined in distinction from beauty, and associated with experiences of the infinite.³ By the early 1800s someone like Richard Payne Knight could articulate a theory in which privations like silence and darkness are specifically associated with the infinite because the infinite is itself a privation of limits or boundaries.⁴ It seems quite characteristic that Coleridge would pick out the word 'silence' from this background, and recognize the philosophical and poetic resources latent in it.

This is significant because *Effusion XXXV* (later to become *The Eolian Harp*) begins with silence. Quietness, of the familiar soon-to-be-interrupted kind, pervades the opening lines; and although the word 'silence' does not occur until line 11—when the interruption occurs—it marks the beginning of the philosophical and linguistic complexity of the poem:

The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of Silence...⁵

Some previous accounts of silence in the conversation poems have pointed to the interplay of sound and silence as markers of presence and absence, and in particular as marking changes in the poet's relationship with nature.⁶ However, the word 'silence' carries a huge complexity in itself before

¹ James Usher, *Clio: Or, A Discourse on Taste*, 2nd edn (London, 1769), p. 114.

² See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 2nd edn (London, 1759; repr. Menston: Scolar P, 1970), pp. 125-6, 144-7. James Usher, *Clio: Or, A Discourse on Taste*, 2nd edn (London, 1769), pp. 107-10, 114-8. Joseph Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London, 1777; repr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965), p. 159. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols (London, 1783; repr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965), I, pp. 48-50. Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 2nd edn (London, 1805), pp. 361-4.

³ Useful overviews of the emergence of the sublime can be found in Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by Fritz Koelln and James Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951), pp. 297-331. Samuel Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960). M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: Norton, 1973), pp. 97-117. Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1985), pp. 101-37.

⁴ Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 2nd edn (London, 1805), pp. 363-4.

⁵ All references to *Effusion XXXV* and *The Eolian Harp* are made to PW II 1 316-28. I quote from the 1796 *Poems* version unless otherwise stated.

⁶ See Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (Sussex, The Harvester P,

any issues of contrast and transformation even arise.

After all, silence is not really an absence in any simple sense at all—rather it is a marker for an absence—it is what is left that tells you that there is an absence. But a marker is itself a presence, so that silence paradoxically brings this absence into presence. Of course, this cannot actually be done in any stable or complete sense, so that comprehending silence amounts to the incompletable process of grasping something indefinite, or infinite. Silence in itself is telling us something about the kinds of relationships with nature, or God, that Coleridge wants to mark out.

Telling of silence is paradoxical too, just as the word 'silence' carries a paradoxical meaning. One obvious response is to say that the sea tells us of silence by being audible at a distance—showing us the silence of the local environment by contradistinction.⁷ This is fair enough, but it seems to miss the tensions that underlie the poem, and that are so often played out elsewhere. Aside from anything else it misses the symbolic significance of the sea. The sea tells us of silence because the two are symbolically linked—the waves with their 'stilly murmur' are transient forms produced by enigmatic forces working in the silence of the deep. Waves and their murmur peter out and flow back into the silence of which the sea is made metaphorically.

The sound qualities of the lines are crucial to the meaning of the whole poem because the word 'silence' is transformed by the patterning of 's' sounds into an onomatopoeic resonance that becomes a structuring reference point:

The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of Silence...

Later when we reach the great 'what if...' of the poem, we find it heavily invested with this resonance:

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?

This is rather striking since it is now the sound qualities of the poetry that are telling us of silence—bringing the sense of the words 'Sea' and 'Silence' into play in spite of their absence. It also provokes an implicit comparison between the images of the sea and the harp, and in spite of the obvious similarity and association between the two images there is a crucial difference,

1979), pp. 216-21, 258-70, etc. Jill Rubenstein, 'Sound and Silence in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *English* 21 (1972), 54-60. Barbara Leah Harman, 'Herbert, Coleridge and the Vexed Work of Narration', *Modern Language Notes* 93 (1978), 888-911. William Christie, 'The Act of Love in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *Sydney Studies in English* 7 (1981), 12-31.

⁷ Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (Sussex, The Harvester P, 1979), p. 218.

because waves are part of the sea, and silence for them is a returning to unity. Neither the harps themselves, nor the tunes produced by them are part of the intellectual breeze—for them silence amounts to extinction.

The struck-out passage in draft 2 of the Rugby manuscript shows Coleridge wrestling with this relationship in greater detail, and he says that the harp's tunes

Creation's great Harmonious Concert form
Thus God, the only universal Soul,
Organiz'd Body as the [~~Instruments~~ ?] Organic Harps,
And each one's Tunes are that, which each calls I.—⁸

There is a great tangle of struck out words and phrases here—'Organiz'd Body' is replaced with 'Mechaniz'd Matter'—what may be 'Instruments' is heavily struck out, and the line ended with 'Harps'—'Organic' is added above 'Instruments' to give 'Organic Harps' and further strikeouts smother the lines. The entire passage is repeated afresh, but with less certainty—now God 'would be' the universal soul, the 'Concert' has become a 'concért' and is 'vast' rather than 'Harmonious', and there is a new tangle between 'Matter Mechaniz'd', and 'Mechaniz'd Matter'.⁹ The grammar of the line ruptures as 'Mechaniz'd' hovers between adjective and verb—God may not be doing the organizing or mechanizing any more, and the causal connection to the harps is hanging in the balance. This connection is crucial, and resurfaces in another draft where the breeze 'sweeps the Instruments, it ~~erst had~~'s passage fram'd' (PW II 1 324).

It is hard to make much clear sense out of this tangle, except to observe that the focus of the lines, and of their torturous revisions seems to fall on the relationship between the tunes and God—they are the terms that are being rehashed, and there is now a 'great Harmonious Concert' in which the tunes participate. It is an interesting attempt to double up on the sense of belonging to the infinite—by making the tunes belong to the both the breeze and the concert, but in the end the problem is still the same—silence involves dropping out of existence.

The Eolian Harp has been connected to a wide range of specific philosophical formulations—arguments have been made in favour of Schelling, Böhme, Plotinus, Hartley, Priestley, Berkeley, and Cudworth.¹⁰ And yet the

⁸ Rugby MS, 27v. For a facsimile reproduction see Paul Cheshire, 'The Eolian Harp', *The Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* NS 17 (Summer 2001), 1-26 (pp. 22-26).

⁹ Rugby MS, 28r. PW gives 'concért', but Cheshire gives 'concért', pointing to the word's usage as 'a musical term, derived from *concinere* – sing together'. See Paul Cheshire, 'The Eolian Harp', *The Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* NS 17 (Summer 2001), 1-26 (pp. 8-9), and see also the Friends of Coleridge website for corrections to PW. Graham Davidson points out Shakespeare's *Henry V* I ii, 'For governments, though high, and low, and lower,/ Put into parts, doth keep in one concert;/ Congruing in a full and natural close,/ Like musick', and the fact that in the 1811 edition, there is a note by Steevens deriving authority for the word from Burney.

¹⁰ See for example Herbert Piper, *The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets*, (London: Athlone P, 1962), 43-6. C. G. Martin, 'Coleridge and Cudworth: A Source for "The Eolian Harp"', *Notes and Queries* 13 (1966), 173-6. Herbert Piper, '“The Eolian Harp” Again', *Notes and Queries* 15 (1968), 23-5. M. H. Abrams, 'Coleridge's "A Light in Sound": Science, Metascience, and Poetic Imagination', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 116 (1972), 458-76. Michael Raiger, 'The Intellectual Breeze, the Corporeality of Thought, and

poem itself does not try to articulate a specific pantheism—rather it allows for a wide range of pantheisms and similar patterns of thought, and comprehends them through the governing question ‘what if?’. That is to say, ‘what are the consequences?’. This is not an exploration of the details of a specific philosophical articulation, but of the consequences of certain general kinds of philosophical moves.

If we look in the obvious places in Coleridge's reading it is not difficult to find plenty of material that shows how questions like this came to be formulated. Priestley himself sets the problem in *Matter and Spirit* for example:

Nor, indeed, is making the Deity to *be*, as well as to *do* every thing, *in this sense*, any thing like the opinion of Spinoza; because I suppose a source of infinite power, and superior intelligence, from which all inferior beings are derived; that every inferior intelligent being has a consciousness distinct from that of the Supreme Intelligence...¹¹

In trying to deny the pantheistic or Spinozistic implications of his account of Deity, Priestley has raised the precise problem of *The Eolian Harp*—the problem of how finite individuals are related to the infinite. Coleridge almost certainly read this, as he specifically picks up on this issue in a letter in 1796 saying

How is it that Dr Priestley is not an atheist?— He asserts in three different Places, that God not only *does*, but *is*, every thing.— But if God *be* every Thing, every Thing is God... Has not Dr Priestly forgotten that *Incomprehensibility* is as necessary an attribute of the First Cause, as Love, or Power, or Intelligence?— (CL I 192-3)

Coleridge was not convinced by Priestley's attempt to stave off the consequences of monistic thought, and remains uncertain. It is this uncertainty that the poem enacts¹²—Coleridge was not drawing on a particular ‘source’, rather he was constructing a deliberately generalizing speculation that dramatizes the metaphysical tensions working in his mind.

The pattern of Coleridge's own later references to *The Eolian Harp* helps to support this argument. Most obviously of course he relates *The Eolian Harp* to Hartley's associationism in the *Biographia* (BL I 117), but in the *Philosophical*

the Eolian Harp', *The Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* NS 20 (Winter 2002), 76-84. For more general discussions of Hartley, Priestley and Berkeley in relation to Coleridge's early poetry see Stephen Prickett, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Poetry of Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970), pp. 46-70. James Engell, 'Imagining into Nature: this Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', in *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream*, ed. by Robert Barth and John Mahoney, (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1990), 81-96 (pp. 83-4).

¹¹ Joseph Priestley, *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works &c of Joseph Priestley*, ed. by J. T. Rutt, 25 vols, (London, 1817-32; repr. New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1972), III, p. 241.

¹² Perry emphasises the ambivalence of the poem, seeing it as reflecting a genuine and abiding undecidedability ('a muddle'). I think this ambiguity – this ability to accommodate intellectual tension – underlies the poem's function as a kind of spirograph for metaphysics. The poem becomes part of the way that Coleridge understands differing philosophical stances, and subsequently participates in recasting various philosophical possibilities into its own categories. See Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1999), pp. 68-70, 113-6.

Lectures he associates the image with Berkeley (LHP 557-8), and this has attracted some recent attention leading to arguments that the poem involves some combination of Berkeley and Hartley.¹³ However, his use of the image is actually even more widely scattered than this suggests—he discusses it in a marginal note on Kant, where he dismisses the conception of the mind as an Eolian harp (M III 247-8), and in a note on Platner discussing Kant (M IV 124). It appears again in marginal notes on Böhme (M I 609) and Heinroth (M II 1003), and in a Notebook entry on Steffens (CN V 6683). Similarly, he uses the related sea imagery in a marginal note on Jacobi, saying: ‘He seems always to have the Image of an Ocean before him, surging itself into forms. The begetting, the creating, these are above him’ (M III 100). The harp image also turns up elsewhere, often performing the function of testing or problematizing the conceptions he is reading or thinking about.¹⁴ The implications of the image are perhaps most tellingly rehearsed in a marginal note on Sherlock’s *A Vindication of the Trinity*:

The doctrine of the Trinity... rests securely on the position—that in Man *omni actioni præit sua propria passio*; Deus autem est *actus purissimus, sine ullâ potentialitate*—. As the Tune produced between the Breeze & the Eolian Harp is not a self-subsistent, so neither Memory or Understanding or even Love in *Man*: for he is a passive as well as active Being... But in God this is not so— (CM V 25-6)

This is particularly interesting because it describes a much clearer and more sophisticated pantheism than can be derived directly from the poem, and once more it emphasizes the problematic status of the finite individual. It also demonstrates the breadth of the image’s application for Coleridge, as he uses it here as an explication of a Trinitarian account of Deity.

I want to suggest that what is most important in *The Eolian Harp* is the connection that is made between the absolute, with the threat it poses to the status of the finite, and the clash between reason and faith.¹⁵ This connection represents the starting point of a philosophical problematic that governs much of Coleridge’s later thought and his attempts to negotiate the relations between reason and faith in his dealings with idealism and pantheism.

The poem ends with the ironic scene of his wife chiding him for being led astray by his speculations and telling him to ‘walk humbly’ with his God—this

¹³ Michael Raiger, ‘The Intellectual Breeze, the Corporeality of Thought, and the Eolian Harp’, *The Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* NS 20 (Winter 2002), 76-84.

¹⁴ CN II 2330, 2937. CN III 3314. CN IV 5192. CN V 6876. CL I 294-5.

¹⁵ The emphasis on faith is even more obvious in the context of the 1796 effusions. *Effusion XXXIV (To an Infant)*, concludes with an address to ‘Thrice holy FAITH!’ – ‘Still let me stretch my arms and cling to Thee, / Meek Nurse of Souls thro’ their long Infancy!’. The final *Effusion XXXVI* (earlier *Absence: A Poem*, and later *Lines on an Autumnal Evening*) in turn takes up the poet’s determination to check his ‘unregenerate mind’ – ‘O Thou wild FANCY, check thy Wing!’ (PW II 1 100-11, 269-72). The relationships between the effusions are easier to trace using John Beer’s edition of the poems which prints the 1796 effusions in order. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. by John Beer, (London: Dent, 1963), pp. 35-56. Magnuson discusses these contextual relationships in detail. Paul Magnuson, “The Eolian Harp” in Context’, *Studies in Romanticism* 24 (1985), 3-20.

is an image of the conflict between reason and faith. It is in the pantheism controversy itself that this conceptual connection is pushed to its crisis, with Jacobi's arguments that all consistent use of speculative reason results in fatalism and atheism—in the swallowing up of the individual in an absolute that leaves no room for faith.¹⁶ Jacobi therefore argues for the rejection of reason, and as part of this general strategy he depicts Lessing as a thinker led astray (into Spinozism) by his rational speculation. Jacobi presents himself as a contrast to Lessing's Spinozism, emphasizing the need for a *salto mortale*, a leap of faith, and ends the book demanding humble faith and obedience to an incomprehensible God, just as Sara does:

This is the *Majesty of the Lord, the Countenance of God*, to which mortal eye cannot reach. But in his goodness He descends to us, and through his grace the Eternal One becomes a presence to man, and He speaks to him... I fall silent, I fall prostrate glowing with thanks and delight.— In shame lest I could still be asking for a better way to knowledge and peace...¹⁷

This pietistic 'shame' and disavowal of thought in the face of a super-rational Deity parallels the poem's self-judgment: 'For never guiltless may I speak of Him, / Th' INCOMPREHENSIBLE! save when with awe / I praise him, and with Faith that inly *feels*'.¹⁸ It seems natural to suggest that the resemblance between the conversation between Sara and the poet and the infamous conversation between Jacobi and Lessing is more than co-incidence. There is even a striking resemblance between some of the details of the two conversations:

Whenever Lessing wanted to represent a personal Divinity, he thought of it as the soul of the All; and he thought the Whole after the analogy of an organic body. Hence, *as soul*, the soul of this Whole would be only an effect, like any other soul in all conceivable systems. Its organic compass, however, cannot be thought after the analogy of the organic *parts* of this compass, inasmuch as there is nothing

¹⁶ For an overview of the controversy itself see Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987). George di Giovanni, 'From Jacobi's Philosophical Novel to Fichte's Idealism: Some Comments on the 1798-99 "Atheism Dispute"', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* XXVII (1989), 75-100. See also di Giovanni's introduction to his translation of Jacobi. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, trans. by George di Giovanni, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994), pp. 3-167. McFarland discusses the controversy in relation to Coleridge, and succeeds in providing a richly contextual account of Coleridge's engagement with German thought. However, his discussion is limited by his commitment to the terms of Coleridge's own self-understanding – especially in his adoption of the 'it is' and 'I am' conceptions. This forces him to suppress many of the complexities of the controversy, and leads to somewhat atypical interpretations of some of its participants – such as his surprising description of Jacobi as a 'radical rationalist' (pp. 130-1) and his interpretation of Spinoza as an unambiguously reductionist and fatalistic thinker (pp. 54-70). The latter in particular begs the question of the controversy itself, which was deeply concerned with the question of whether Spinozism or pantheism is inevitably reductive and fatalistic or not. Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 53-72, 77-96, 126-34, 289-97.

¹⁷ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994), pp. 249-50 [212].

¹⁸ The Rugby MS emphasizes the connection between thinking and the guilt with the variant: 'Nor may I unblam'd or speak or think of Him'. Rugby MS, 28r.

existing outside it to which it can refer...¹⁹

The image of the organic compass is reminiscent of an Eolian harp—a mechanical toy driven into action by mysterious external forces. Earlier in their discussions, Lessing and Jacobi had discussed Leibniz's comparison of human freewill to the needle of a compass that thinks it points to the north of its own volition. Jacobi argued (and they agree) that this is essentially similar to Spinoza's image of a stone that has been thrown and believes it is continuing its motion by freewill.²⁰ Most startling though is Lessing's description of God as 'the soul of the All' ('Seele des Alls'), which is reminiscent of Coleridge's 'Soul of each and God of all'. Indeed, the phrase clearly caught Coleridge's attention, because he made a fascinating marginal note on this passage in Jacobi, claiming that this idea of 'the soul of the All' had been adopted by Schelling (M III 82).

Coleridge's reading of Jacobi can be confirmed by April 1799, which is about three years after the poem, but there is reason to think he may have known something about the pantheism controversy before this.²¹ A contextual study by Schrickx aimed at exploring the question turns up a surprising wealth of references to Jacobi, Mendelssohn (Jacobi's opponent in the dispute) and Lessing in British reviews and periodical articles in the 1790s.²² Coleridge also made mention of both Lavater and Böhme in the Gutch Memorandum Book which helps to demonstrate his awareness of German thought (CN I 174, 287). This is confirmed by Coleridge's letters in 1796 which include references to Kant and Schiller, a significant mention of Mendelssohn, and most importantly a description of Lessing as 'the most formidable infidel' (CL I 197, 209, 279, 284). This last is especially interesting, since Lessing's reputation as an infidel was primarily the result of Jacobi's revelation of his Spinozism, so it seems unlikely that Coleridge could be aware of this reputation without knowing something about the events. This amounts to a substantial case for Coleridge's general knowledge of the controversy as early as 1795-6, when he was writing and revising the first versions of the poem.

My point though is not that Jacobi was the specific source here, but that

¹⁹ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994), p. 196 [34-5].

²⁰ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994), pp. 191-2 [23-6]. See G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God the Freedom on Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. by E. M. Huggard, ed. by Austin Farrer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), pp. 150-1. The Spinoza passage is in Letter LXII (LVIII). Benedict Spinoza, *On the Improvement of the Understanding, The Ethics, Correspondence*, trans. by R. H. M. Elwes, (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 390-1. Coleridge made marginal notes on these exact passages in both Spinoza and Jacobi, and although he is critical of Spinoza he in turn condemns Jacobi's criticism of Spinoza saying 'And is Jacobi's Theory of Freedom, at all different?' The two passages are fascinating since they show a more sophisticated (and conflicted) grasp of the issues than is usually attributed to Coleridge. See M III 81 and M V 204.

²¹ Schrickx demonstrates, convincingly, that Coleridge must have read Jacobi by April 1799. See W. Schrickx, 'Coleridge and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* XXXVI.3 (1958), 812-50 (p. 818). A similar point is made by McFarland. Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 296-7.

²² See W. Schrickx, 'Coleridge and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* XXXVI.3 (1958), 812-50 (pp. 829-38). Schrickx even speculates that some of these reviews may have been written by Coleridge.

some version of the story and the idea of the clash between reason and faith had made its way to him, and that it contributed to the ways in which he was reading his sources. This is shown not in any particular kind of pantheism being selected in the poem, but in the identification of pantheism as leading to a crisis of reason and faith. The material of the poem is certainly tied up with Hartley, Priestley, and possibly Berkeley, but the question that is being directed at this material is, I suspect, derived from Jacobi.

Much of the conceptual structuring behind *The Eolian Harp* is present throughout the poetry of the next few years. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for example, the themes of silence, faith, and the threatened or suffering finite individual abound. Even the ship itself seems to be yet another wind-driven toy, with the presence and absence of the breeze marking major transformations in the mariner. At the crisis point the mariner is becalmed—adrift on an infinite supernatural ocean and experiencing all of the privations that finitude has to offer—solitude, darkness, silence, and even evil.

I add evil to the list because defining evil as a privation is a typical pantheistic move, explicitly made by Spinoza and many others.²³ If God has to be everything as well as to do everything, then He must actually be every evil thing too, so that the problem of evil has an extra immediacy—denying the reality of evil in some sense (as by calling it a privation) seems the only answer. Of course, evil has a special role to play in the poem because it is what defines the individual—the weight of consequence and moral force is what constitutes the mariner's humanity, and his story. The poem seems to me to suggest that this is what makes a finite human being in distinction from the deep it is cast adrift on.

These kinds of thematic connections make the addition of the 'one life' passage to *The Eolian Harp* in 1817 all the more fascinating:

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 slumbering on its instrument.

It is, of course, Coleridge's own attempt to answer the 'what if' of the poem.²⁴ The precise circumstances of this answer are rather complex—not

²³ See for example Spinoza's Letter XXXVI (XXIII). Benedict Spinoza, *On the Improvement of the Understanding, The Ethics, Correspondence*, trans. by R. H. M. Elwes, (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 347. Coleridge makes one of his most critical marginal notes on this passage, condemning Spinoza's argument because of the use of the concept of privation (M V 202-3). However, Coleridge himself adopts a similar account in his later manuscripts particularly the 'On the Divine Ideas' MS. Although he ostensibly avoids the concept of privation (OM 218-9) he too winds up denying full existence to evil – defining it, rather confusedly, as potential or a potentialization of good (OM 246-7). See also CN IV 4998.

²⁴ Abrams has explored some of the specific philosophical connections that underlie the passage. See M. H. Abrams,

only had he subsequently developed on the themes provoked by *The Eolian Harp* in a series of poems (*Frost at Midnight*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and others), he had also struggled in the *Biographia* to articulate a transcendental theory that would give him the creative imagination without leaving him trapped in the icy fatalism that Jacobi warned of.²⁵ The insertion shows the traces of his anxiety over this, as the emphasis on 'Life', 'Light', 'Joyance' and 'love' is well placed to intercept the reader prior to the (now explosive) 'what if' of the poem—enforcing an understanding of that question that avoids its most dangerous (fatalistic) implications. Most importantly it enforces a specific understanding of silence: 'the mute still Air' (the silence), is 'Music slumbering on its instrument'—only slumbering, not lost.

I have speculated here that Coleridge had encountered some version of the story about Jacobi, Lessing and the pantheism controversy by the time he was writing and revising *Effusion XXXV*. Of course this is not dependent on the idea that he had actually read specific texts—all it requires is that he knew something about the events, and had perhaps encountered a few of their characteristic phrases and images. I have presented evidence for the plausibility of this speculation, although I do not claim to have demonstrated it.

Regardless of whether or not you think I am right, the really important conclusion that I draw from all of this remains: even if Coleridge did not have Lessing in mind when he wrote the poem, he must have had the poem in mind when he did read about the pantheism controversy. It seems inevitable that when he came to read about Lessing's pantheism, Jacobi's faith, and even the 'organic compass' discussed by them he must have understood the matter in ways that were in part determined by the experience of writing the early poetry. This conceptual nexus of silence, faith and pantheism structures his understanding of those texts and in turn sets the problems that he spent the rest of his life grappling with. This is crucial when we come to analyse his later thought and theology, because it helps to show the motivating factors that drive his anxiety about pantheism and the infinite.

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'Coleridge's "A Light in Sound": Science, Metascience, and Poetic Imagination', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 116 (1972), 458-76. Likewise there have been a number of accounts that treat the passage as a problematic insertion that unbalances the poem. See Albert Gérard, 'Counterfeiting Infinity: *The Eolian Harp* and the Growth of Coleridge's Mind', *Journal of English and German Philology* 60 (1961), 411-22 (pp. 411-2). Humphry House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), pp. 75-8. Ronald Wendling, 'Coleridge and the Consistency of "The Eolian Harp"' *Studies in Romanticism* 8 (1968), 26-42. Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1985), pp. 57-9.

²⁵ The philosophical chapters of the *Biographia* are shot through with hidden connections to the pantheism controversy that have been overlooked – as I will demonstrate elsewhere, circumstances permitting.