Sara Coleridge's Annotated *Phantasmion*
'Is it not the work of a poet's daughter if not of a poet?'

Elizabeth Shand

SARA COLERIDGE CONCEIVED OF THE FAIRY TALE *Phantasmion* for her son, Herbert, in Autumn 1834, and expanded the story at the behest of her husband.[1] In 1837, it was published anonymously by William Pickering in an edition of 250 copies. Upon its publication, Sara viewed her novel with a mix of dismissiveness and pride: she describes it as a 'mere trifle and innocent amusement' written during a protracted period of illness, but also aligns the tale's imaginative fancy to 'the fairy tales of Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Lamb, my father, my Uncle Southey, and Mr. Wordsworth'.[2] Today, scholarship on *Phantasmion* grows steadily alongside increased interest in Sara Coleridge, but its critical and literary significance remains obscure.[3] In this essay, I broaden the contexts of Sara Coleridge's work on *Phantasmion* with remarkable new manuscript material: copious annotations from 1846–47 within a copy of *Phantasmion* that she presented to her intimate friend, Aubrey de Vere.[4]

Since its publication, *Phantasmion* has both delighted and flummoxed readers due to its highly imaginative imagery interwoven throughout a digressive, sometimes rambling plot. The novel follows the adventures of Phantasmion, the young orphaned king of Palmland. Aided by the fairy Potentilla, Queen of the Insects, Phantasmion metamorphoses into various insects to explore the surrounding lands, befriend allies, trick foes, and defend his kingdom. The novel maps the history of three neighboring kingdoms: Palmland, an agricultural kingdom replete with grain and fruit; Rockland, a manufacturing kingdom rich with minerals and metals; and Almaterra, an ancient kingdom over which both Palmland and Rockland vie for allyship. Failed patriarchs and loveless marriages have created conflict among the formerly harmonious Palmland and Rockland; Phantasmion, however, seeks the love of the princess of Rockland, Iarine, and finds allies in Iarine's cousins Leucoia, Zelneth, and Karadan, and the King of Almaterra, Penselimer. After a series of adventures that bring Phantasmion into contact with an evil 'fish-woman' (Seshelma), spirits of the flowers (Feydeleen) and of the wind (Oloola), and a powerful

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1 Sara Coleridge, 1802–1852. Like other Sara Coleridge scholars, I acknowledge the difficulty of naming her in critical work that seeks to better understand her professional identity. To avoid confusion in a journal primarily devoted to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, however, I have opted to refer to Sara Coleridge by her forename.

2 Peter Swaab, *The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7, 8; hereafter, *RSCT*.

3 The building momentum of Sara Coleridge scholarship seeks to study her private and public intellectual life. See *RSTC*; Peter Swaab, ed. *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2007); Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Robin Schofield, *The Vocation of Sara Coleridge: Authorship and Religion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). In 2020, *Phantasmion* and Sara Coleridge were both anthologized in the *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Victorian Women's Writing*, eds. Lesa Scholl and Emily Morris (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

4 Access to and study of the annotated *Phantasmion* has benefitted from the generous assistance of Dr. Elizabeth Ott, Frank Borden Hanes Curator of Rare Books, Rare Book Collection, Louis Wilson Round Special Collections Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

witch whose victims fall into an enchanted slumber (Melledine), *Phantasmion* culminates in a final battle and marriage between Phantasmion and Iarine that reunites the kingdoms. To this day, critics read the convoluted family relationships and imaginative descriptive imagery in *Phantasmion* as an acute refraction of Sara's childhood.[5]

Sara returned to *Phantasmion* at the request of Aubrey de Vere (1814–1902), the Irish poet and essayist who became a close confidante following the death of her husband Henry Nelson Coleridge in 1843. Their close companionship during Sara's widowhood was combined with romantic flirtation, but 'their relationship stopped short of full intimacy' due, in part, to the twelve-year age gap between her and the younger de Vere.[6] Still, their intellectual partnership led them to debate poetry, politics, and religion at length; their opposing stances on the Oxford Movement and critical assessments of Wordsworth's poetry formed their most sustained subjects. Sara credits the renewal of her creative drive, in part, to their intellectual discourse. She refers to a group of manuscript poems when she writes, 'My conversations with Mr de Vere in the years 1843,4,5, our discussions of Wordsworth especially, re-excited my little weak poetic faculty. The poemets which were produced under this influence, I shall mark thus—*for A. de V.*—as they were sent to him in letters during our early correspondence.'[7] Among these 'poemets,' five indicate her return to *Phantasmion*: 'L'Envoy to Phantasmion,' 'Zelenth,' 'Feydeleen to Zelneth,' 'Song for Phantasmion,' and 'Song of Leucoia.'

Edith Coleridge, Sara's daughter, first published 'L'Envoy' in the *Memoirs and Letters of Sara Coleridge* (1874), noting that it had been written by her mother 'in a copy of *Phantasmion* about the year 1845'.[8] Peter Swaab correctly hypothesizes that this copy was 'very likely de Vere's copy'.[9] However, its content is far more extensive than Edith admitted or than Sara Coleridge scholars have heretofore surmised. In total, the copy contains 139 separate entries, including all five 'poemets' as well as marginal notes and derivative essays that engulf the main text.[10] Materially, it corresponds to other examples of her marginalia, including a presentation copy of *Pretty Lessons in Verse* to Dora Wordsworth and an extensively annotated copy of *The Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, completed by her at the behest of Henry Crabb Robinson in 1850.

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[5] For more on *Phantasmion* as a critical response to Sara's Romantic heritage, see Hilary Newman, 'The Structure of Sara Coleridge's *Phantasmion*, *A Fairy Tale*,' *The Coleridge Bulletin* n.s. 42 (2013): 39–48; Joanna Taylor, '(Re-)Mapping the 'native vale': Sara Coleridge's *Phantasmion*,' *Romanticism* 21.3 (2015): 265–79; and Donelle Ruwe, '*Phantasmion*, or the Confessions of a Female Opium Eater,' in *Material Transgressions: Beyond Romantic Bodies, Genders, Things*, eds. Kate Singer, Ashley Cross, and Suzanne L. Barnett (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 275–96.

[6] Barbeau, *Her Life and Thought*, 155 (152–56), and Barbeau, 'Sara Coleridge on Love and Romance,' *The Wordsworth Circle*, 46.1 (2015): 36–44 for thorough discussions of Sara's relationship with de Vere.

[7] Quoted in Swaab, *Poems*, 4.

[8] Sara Coleridge, *Memoirs and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, 2 vols., ed. Edith Coleridge (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), 1:175n; hereafter, *MLSC*.

[9] Swaab, *Poems*, 177n.

[10] Sara's annotative process creates an exquisite physical object. She completely fills the blank paratextual spaces, and notes to the main text range from brief remarks to discursive essays; rarely does she cross out a word or phrase. The lengthier notes fill much of the available marginal space: she links some notes from page header to footer, and several continue across two or more pages; for others she turned the book by degrees to entirely fill the top, bottom, and side margins.

However, the annotated *Phantamsion* shows a wider range of intellectual expression than either example.[11] It likely presents Sara's response to de Vere's desire 'to know particularly what I did and where I was when I wrote the book, and all the circumstances attending its composition.'[12] Sara wrote most of the dated annotations in June and July 1846, although she penned at least one note in April 1847. The long retention period was likely due to de Vere's sudden departure to care for his ailing father, an occasion marked by Sara in the front matter: 'July 13th. My friend has received a 'very alarming account' of his Father and must return to Ireland immediately. May this cloud have vanished from his sky ere I hear of him again!' (p. i).[13] Her protracted possession of the copy overlaps with her preparation of a new edition of *Biographia Literaria*—an edition hailed as the pinnacle of her career and as Sara's ultimate reconciliation of her 'public vocation' and 'domestic concerns.'[14] Her simultaneous work on *Phantasmion*, however, complicates this history. At the same time that Sara worked to reconcile her gender and work as editor of her father's writings, she returned to her novel and wrote interchangeably as author, critic, editor, mother, romantic admirer, and widow.

In the transcriptions that follow, I seek to introduce the character and content of the annotations with a representative sampling. Her tendency to shift between descriptive, critical, and confessional modes makes it difficult to neatly categorize each note, but several motives are apparent: to detail the creative origins of the novel; to respond as a reader with observations occasioned by the text; and to re-assess her compositional craft. Many of the entries contain an artfulness commensurate to prose poetry. Although friendship with de Vere occasioned the annotations, Sara's prolonged possession of the copy caused her to write almost to herself as much as to him. In all, the notes convey a re-assessment of her novel that asserts creative autonomy and claims her poetic lineage. Complete transcriptions are not possible within the space of this essay, although I have endeavored to reproduce the most substantive of the new material. I have not included the manuscript poems, which Peter Swaab previously published; entries that are primarily biographical; nor Sara's several extracts from other sources. Rather than reproduce the annotations in ascending order by page, I have grouped them thematically to emphasize the varied motivations behind her annotations.

[11] See Heidi Thomson, 'Sara Coleridge's Annotation in *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children*,' *Notes and Queries*, 58.4 (2011): 548–49 for a discussion of Sara's annotated copy of *Pretty Lessons*, and Leslie Nathan Broughton, *Sara Coleridge and Henry Reed* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1937) for Sara's annotations to *The Memoir of William Wordsworth*.

[12] *RSCT* 17.

[13] De Vere departed for Ireland on 3 July 1846, see S. M. Paraclita Reilly, *Aubrey de Vere, Victorian Observer* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds Ltd., 1956), 24.

[14] Schofield, 3.

Selected Annotations[15]

Origins

Below is the presentation note, addressing de Vere as 'Dear Friend,' penned in the blank front matter pages to provide a summative review of *Phantasmion*'s origins and compositional history. The distilled account overlooks the emotional and psychological intensity of her experiences in Ilchester, but it resolves competing accounts of the story's compositional timeline by confirming that it was nearly complete before her nervous collapse and convalescence in Ilchester.[16] The matter-of-fact descriptions fade into an embodied expression of sorrow in a poignant recognition of her intellectual past confronting her present sense of mortality. The entry is indicative of her penchant in the copy for balancing mental and intellectual activity with bodily suffering.

June 27th 1846. Dear Friend,

I cannot tell exactly when I began to write this little book – but it must have been, I think, in 1835-6. My twins lived and died in February 1834: I was so weak for half a year after that time that I could scarcely sit up on my couch to take my meals.[17]

As soon as I began to rise up a little from this dire prostration, which commenced above a year before, I tried to employ myself in teaching Herbert; & one of my methods of teaching appears in the Pretty Lessons, which was only a handful out of a heap of lesson-poems of my writing.

When these were printed I began to think of writing a little fantastic story for Herbert's amusement – without any thought of its being published. The commencement was admired by older heads, and I was induced to carry it on as far as Fancy led. Shut out as I was from the sight of Nature and distant from my native vale, the hues and forms impressed upon my mind in the season of childhood & youth, rose up vividly before me and were presented in this little composition in new combinations.

I was then living at Hampstead. When the tale was nearly finished, I took an

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[15] All page numbers refer to Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*. London: Pickering, 1837, Rare Book Collection. The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The transcriptions preserve any strikethroughs, punctuation, and spelling from the original. Sara occasionally emphasizes words with a short underline, retained here. She frequently uses dashes of varying lengths, but all are rendered here as ' – '. When multiple notes compete for space on the page, she occasionally separates them with a small line, which I have not retained. She indicates breaks in thought with line breaks, with exaggerated spaces in-line, or with opposing page margins. In these cases, I have transcribed line breaks and introduced paragraph breaks where appropriate. All insertions, marked by a caret in her marginalia, are silently incorporated.

[16] For competing accounts of *Phantasmion*'s composition, see Bradford K. Mudge, *Sara Coleridge, A Victorian Daughter: Her Life and Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 95–97; Kathleen Jones, *A Passionate Sisterhood: Women of the Wordsworth Circle* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 297; Dennis Low, *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 133–34; Katie Waldegrave, *The Poets' Daughters: Dora Wordsworth and Sara Coleridge* (London: Hutchinson, 2013), 184–85; and Barbeau, *Her Life and Thought*, 57–59. In the annotated copy, Sara identifies two verses composed in Ilchester: Potentilla's song in vol. 3, ch. 10 (p. 295), and Melledine's song in vol. 3, ch. 11 (p. 309).

[17] Sara misstates the month of their birth and death. She gave birth to twins Florence and Berkeley on 14 January 1834 and they died two days later.

unfortunate journey to my Father's birthplace, before I was enough restored to bear the fatigue of travelling. On my return I was so exhausted that after the most violent agitation of spirits during half a day, on the way from Ilminster especially, and during the night at Ilchester, I fell into a sort of convulsion fit.

I was obliged to remain six weeks in the I. inn,[18] *and then returned home in an invalid carriage. This threw me back in health for six months. At the end of that time we came to my present abode, and Phantasmion was printed, I think, before our change of residence.*

But it saddens me to retrace my past life. Events are seldom otherwise than sad. Change itself & the progress of Time is sad. Our spiritual and intellectual life seems more exempt from time and chance. Here alone there is gladness & tranquility. The world without is full of sorrow – real sorrow, unreal pleasure, evanescent indeed as snow upon a river. The intellectual life has a solidity & permanence about it. We have our old powers of thought and yearly new additions – our outward possessions wane & worsen continually or suddenly fall away and have us sad at heart.

I never feel cheerful except when my intellect is engaged & occupied. But now my eyes are dimmed with tears, and I will say no more – except to express a hope that your outward life may continue to be much happier than mine, & your mind were more & more healthfully active. (pp. [vi–viii], 1)

Sara's son Herbert is connected with the origins of the book in at least two ways: it was written for him, and it uses some aspects of his appearance and character. The second note below, dated April 1847, is the latest dated entry in the copy and shows that Sara returned to the text to append her earlier, undated marginalia with an update on Herbert's growth. She had long held an interest in childhood development, tracking her children's changes in letters and a 'Baby Diary,' and appears to have extended this close observation to *Phantasmion*'s representation of children. She later commends the children as 'the most real parts of the book' (p. 177), suggesting that she sought realistic portrayals based on observation. Although in the notes below she likens Phantasmion to Hebert, elsewhere she likens Phantasmion to herself. Next to an opening scene that describes Phantasmion's jump from the boughs of a pomegranate tree, Sara writes, 'a bit of my own tree-climbing experience' (p. 3).

My Herby, when I wrote this, was almost an ideal fine child. People called him the Rose of Hampstead. He had full bright blue eyes, round rosy cheeks, a broad round nose[,] a lovely mouth and pearls of teeth. Sed tempus mutatur et ille mutatur in illo.[19] *He has fine eyes still & ruddy cheeks, but the dreamy fairy tale delicate brightness departed with his childhood. He is now no Phantasmion, but a sturdy school boy cuffing and being cuffed, knocking down & to be knocked down – reading Dickens instead of Milton, preferring the site of a pottery to a picturesque scene sapping*[20] *at mathematics, fretting over Latin verse, rowing his hands into blisters &*

[18] Ilchester Inn.

[19] Trans. 'But the times change, and he changes with it.'

[20] To pore over books; to be studious. 'sap, v. 3,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

> *bathing five times a day! A most unromantic sunburnt youth – but worth fifty Phantasmions!* (pp. 12–13)

> *April 1847. Since I wrote the note in the last page Herbert has changed again, and become more like what he was in early childhood, his complexion is clearer than it was – his features are softer and more harmonious. He is now 16 and 1/2, so onward to five or six and twenty and then the bloom goes off the plum. Then, indeed, I shall feel old when my very children are fading outwardly, and sigh more than at my own decline. But these thoughts belong only to the upper surface of the mind. The plum is richer within, after the bloom is brushed off the skin, than before. Yet these signs of mortality cannot but affect us.* (pp. 14–15)

Phantasmion tends to be read as Sara's imaginative return to her Lake District childhood during a period of illness. Her notes significantly deepen what is known of these origins by tying passages to specific scenes, memories, and emotions. For example, she likens Phantasmion's "view of his own royal domain" from the top of a mountain to her own memories of mounting Skiddaw (p. 129). Other Lake District landmarks that she names as influences include Crow Park (p. 50), Borodale (p. 57), Gummoch Lake (p. 84), the valley of Troutbeck (p. 192), and Castle Lott (p. 235); she admits the influence of Hampstead landscape, too (p. 342, 351). The annotations reveal another source of imagery: natural science. Sara cites William Jardine's illustrated guides to zoology, geology, and etymology, which were published throughout the 1830s and that she likely read with Herbert.[21] Elsewhere, she notes Herbert's interest in gems (p. 24) and her own readings in ornithology (p. 74) and etymology (p. 188) as influences.

> *This chapter* [part 1, chapter 6] *was a favorite with me I thought it so visionary and mysterious. I had great delight in writing it. Then the Tale was in the days of its youth – full of hope & promise.*

> *A dimly bright vista of fancy & dream invention, shone before me. Doubtless the scenery of this passage was my native Lake by moon-light transported into fairy-land and faërized.* (pp. 36–37)

> *This scene was suggested by the top of Skiddaw. How often I climb Skiddaw even now in dreams! My dream Skiddaw differs from the real one. It recurs to me over & over again.* (p. 129)

> *We sometimes amused ourselves, when children, with whirling the great watch cattle and observing its effect on the various cats & dogs that strayed up to Greta hall on foraging excursions & passed by us while we were gardening. It amused us greatly to see the varieties of demeanour, under the infliction.*[22] (p. 167)

[21] *MLSC* 1:97.

[22] The meaning of "watch cattle" is not apparent. The context suggests that it may be a type of cattle prod.

I read Jardine's gaily coloured Zoology and used to display the pictures to the children who sate beside me on my couch, before I devised this tale. (p. 189)

Personal Relationships

Penned in the Part Two opener, Sara alludes to her concurrent work on a new edition of *Biographia Literaria*, work that she elsewhere describes as a 'filial phenomenon'.[23] After listing her current reading undertaken for the new edition, she transitions into a clear-sighted articulation of *Phantasmion*'s comparative merits. She aligns it with picturesque imagery—'a little green field,' 'a clear rivulet'—to claim its distinct power within Romantic aesthetics. As demonstrated here, Sara's commentary on personal relationships—familial or romantic—tend to intermix with her literary commentary. She cuts to a close-reading of Phantasmion and Iarine's relationship that then fades into a teasing, sexually-forward address to de Vere that quotes his own poetry to mock his naïve understanding of romantic love—remarks prompted, Sara suggests, by de Vere's anti-marriage stance. Her sense of intellectual maturity thus frames an expression of sexual maturity. This note, and the three below, present Sara's most direct addresses to de Vere in the copy.

Since I last scribbled on the margins of this Fairy Tale[,] I have been <u>immersed</u> in a grand defense of Luther – quite up to the eyes in Julius Hare, & his long pondered thoughts upon Oxford theology, and the writings of Carlyle, the value of Teutonic speculation, Guenther and Goeschel, Baader and Schelling, and above all the spiritual wisdom of S.T.C.[24]

Yet when I come to this ~~little~~ Tale again it shines with its own little quiet unobtrusive light just as it did before. If it be small and feeble as that of the glow-worm, yet it is as pure and innocuous. There is nothing false about it – and if it soothes your eye at all it will soothe as much after you have dwelt on deep & high expositions of truth as before. Just so – if you have a little green field with a few trees and a clear rivulet wandering through it; you will like that field after you have climbed Mount Blanc and Vesuvius as well as you did before. The staple of the little book is outward Nature – & that, if truly pictured, even though faintly, will ever have its charm.

*July 11*th.

But I was about to say that I consider Phantasmion's love, at this stage, to be three parts admiration, – one part affection. Afterward, when he has gained her heart, the proportions are reversed, although the admiration has been trebled, since he has now seen her mind and heart in themselves – not merely guessed them from her outward excellence, and now he sees her outward part still more lovely through their mental

[23] *MLSC* 2:98.

[24] Sara presumably references the preparation of her long discussion of Martin Luther in the 'Introduction' to *Biographia Literaria*; see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sara Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1847), civ–cxxvii.

atmospheric medium.

But to whom do I address these himenous love notices – to the wood of my desk, or to the scarcely more love-impressible mind of a friend of mine, who knows nought about love except for a 'stone Dian of thirteen',[25] *or being made love to by an Acasta?*[26] *– at least that is all he says about such matters.*

This is said by me out of revenge for some little scornful hints and grand hyper-anti-hymenealisms indulged in by the said Friend. (pp. 133–35)

The next two notes poignantly express romantic grievance. In them, Sara defends her unconventional romantic relationship with de Vere against moral criticism, and dignifies her one-sided love with poignant resignation that credits herself with strength, resilience, and resolute devotion. In each note, Sara seems to associate adjoining scenes in *Phantasmion* that concern love, loss, and romantic separation with her own romantic experiences. Her notes present critical interjections, too: she may resist her father's habitual entanglement between love and hope in the second entry, which she then expands into a moral defense of her love for de Vere. In an appended note dated July 6th, she writes that on 'behalf of some patient sufferers I would say, that trying *not* to love is very like trying not to be awake. The busy brain keeps moving, the captured heart keeps beating, as if in mockery of such efforts' (p. 325–26).

When we are separated from a friend by absence which goes on from day to day and from week to week – still pushing on its limit, – one after another so many blossoms of thought & fancy, which we meant to pluck and cast into our friend's bosom, with all their dew upon them & their fresh fragrance in its first fragrancy, have drooped & withered & fallen to nothing – so many roses here are overblown & come to decay, that our memory seems to us, in our sickly pining mood, like a flower cemetery, full of dead blossoms and decaying leaves. (pp. 234–36)

Some say that Love cannot live long apart from Hope. This is not true – Love may exist where there is a perfect sense and acknowledgement that it never can be, that it ought not to be, returned. Of course such a despairing Love is not full of agitation and bitterness like that which still hopes and is ever disappointed. It is quiet and humble, is glad of partial slight returns and shadowy gratifications. It lives in the present and as it were, from hand to mouth, and in its tranquil sadness not often survives a Passion that has been fed with Hope from hour to hour. July 5th 1846 (pp. 324–25)

Sara reflects on her process of mourning her husband, Henry Nelson Coleridge, who had died on 26 January 1843. She indicates the profound loss one lover as she moves toward another. The somber subject matter and tone of these notes may also reflect more immediate correspondence with de Vere: in an August 1846 letter, only a few weeks after she penned this entry, Sara

[25] 'Cold looked she as the waveless breast / Of some stone Dian at thirteen' in Aubrey de Vere, 'Love's Spite,' *The Poetical Works of Aubrey de Vere* (London: 1884), 215–16.

[26] Aubrey de Vere, 'Greek Idyls.—3. Lycius,' *Poetical Works*, 80–82.

attempts to console de Vere over the death of his father.[27]

> *In the first absorbing sorrows on the death of those we have deeply loved, how the soul drinks in with avidity all outward sounds of mourning – how eagerly it seizes all the pomp & paraphernalia of Grief and Lamentation – the hearse, the pall, the nodding plumes, the double crape, the slow procession, the funeral talking! – At least it was so with me. I was excited, exalted, was in a semi-delirious state of sombre transport. The sinking of spirits after this – the blank, in which we cannot realize even the grave much less the world beyond it, is dreadful indeed. These are the two first stages of the pilgrimage of woe and heart desolation. July 21. 1846. (pp. 357–58)*

Literary Reflections

Sara comments on a wide range of literary texts that underscore her place in the transition between what we now think of as Romantic and Victorian literary cultures. The first note, in which she appears to address herself in the second-person 'you,' compares a description of the bleak landscape surrounding Penselimer's ancient castle to the work of Tennyson and Shelley, perhaps referring to the dilapidated medieval landscapes in 'Lady of Shallot' (1832) or 'Mariana' (1832). Her study of her father and father-figures, Southey and Wordsworth, is dominant: she most frequently refers to Southey's *Thalaba The Destroyer* (p. 56, 187, 207) as a creative influence on *Phantasmion*. Throughout, Sara locates her critical authority within an impressive backdrop of Romantic and Victorian texts.

> *I wrote this before I ever read a line of Tennyson – yes – but you had read Shelley, and Shelley had read S.T.C.* (p. 105)

> *This is a picture for the mind's eye. I used to think it might be painted on canvas, but now I see that the mary golds would not tell in a painting. Even my Uncle Southey's wild romances and the Ancient Mariner have never furnished subjects for good material pictures. The lines & hues that produce the witchery effect to the mind are too fine[,] intricate & shadowy to be placed effectively before the outward eye.* (p. 267)

> *Heraud [28] thought I must certainly have had some deep philosophical meaning in this tale, but I assured him that it meant nothing more than what appeared on the surface. I do not know that the Midsummer night's dream means anything more than a love story and lovely views of outward things, with some drollery interspersed. La Motte Forque's Tales are of the same kind infinitely better planned and executed than this, but no higher in point of scope & moral. Undine at least is not.[29]* (pp. 337–38)

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[27] *MLSC* 2:70–72.

[28] John Heraud (1799–1887) was a British journalist and poet. Indicative of his intimacy with the Coleridge family, he delivered an oration at the funeral of S.T.C. in 1834 at the Russell Institution.

[29] The German Romanticist Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777–1843) produced many romances, novels, and plays between 1810 and 1815 that dramatized Germanic mythology. Some were translated and reprinted in *Popular Tales and Romances of the Northern Nations* (1823), to which Sara may refer. Fouqué is most remembered today for the

Her indebtedness to her Romantic forefathers occasionally gives way to pointed critical departures. She habitually acknowledges the powerful influence that Wordsworth's writings have had on her, but she also argues vehemently as a critic.[30] This entry builds on a series of letters to de Vere in 1846, in which she drew up a scale of Wordsworth's poetry that disparages his later production. Wordsworth's 'Laodamia,' quoted in the opening of her note, bears the brunt of her critique elsewhere for its forced style and its misrepresentation of female mourning. She writes with a biting energy, charging Wordsworth with political insincerity and, as a result, poetry that lacks spiritual profundity.

> *'He spake of Love – such Love as spirits feel.'*[31] *A human love – yet not the love of God and of each other in Christ, a mere purified aerialized equablized reproduction of what is felt here below – a-vaunt – pale shadow! – cold unimaginable ungraspable image! – It is in this way that the great Bard, like the dog crossing the brook – lets the meat out of his mouth not to get a finer yet equally substantial mouthful – but a watery shadow. So he has gone from his grand Sonnets to Liberty, to Milton, Clarkson, Toussant L'Ouveture, to Ecclesiastical Sonnets, strains in behalf of modes of thought and feeling which never at any time had or will have any hold upon his heart or recognition from his deeper mind – notions to which he clings not for their own sakes, but because of their political connections and their supposed power to keep all things in their present order, and the Radicals from getting the upper hand. Wilson & others have observed how cold is W's Christianity. How can it be warm when its heart is on the outside and the institute with its form commends the doctrine, not vice versa.* (pp. 327–29)

Comments on her Compositional Craft

Although she comments on *Phantasmion* for de Vere, her return to the text prompted Sara to re-assess it for herself. A significant group of the annotations explicate or expand on Sara's compositional craft. They demonstrate 'the priority of the subjective in Sara Coleridge's thought,' as Barbeau writes of *Phantasmion* itself.[32] Sara occasionally admits fault or suggests new edits ('A stupid song,' p. 99; 'Silent for silently is bad, p. 158), but overwhelmingly explains her creative rationale and praises descriptive effects. She writes as editor, author, reader, and critic to offer buoyant insights that affirm her authority over the opinions of others; largely, she is pleased with the overall effect of her narrative craft. For example, she highlights what she deems 'the best scene in the book': descriptions of Phantasmion and Penselimer illumined by moonlight.

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fairytale novella *Undine* (1811).

[30] See Peter Swaab, 'Sara Coleridge as a Critic of Wordsworth,' *Grasmere 2012: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference*, compiled by Richard Gravil (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2012), 130–46. See *RSCT* 83–99 for Sara's collected writings on Wordsworth.

[31] 'He spake of love, such Love as spirits feel / In worlds whose course is equable and pure'. ('Laodamia,' 97–98).

[32] Barbeau, *Her Life and Thought*, 66.

I have sometimes fancied that this is a subject for a Landseer picture – the bloody panther – the white stag – the dark youth, the fairhaired damsel, & the bright Phantasmion.[33] *But it would not tell its own story – Phantasmion's part in the scene would not be obvious. He would be a mere object for the eye.* (p. 103)

I consider this one of the best scenes in the book – though I never heard anybody praise it. It was one of those which came to me of itself for the sake above beauty and was not forged in order to continue the tale.

Of course it is made up out of old poetic elements and picturesque presentations. But in this minor way it was ingenious to make the lunacy of Penselimer turn upon the moon, and thus to have a special reason for exhibiting his sombre majesty and melancholy grace by moonlight. (pp. 106–7)

Don't you think that the gloominess of Karadan and the gloominess of his fate is well preserved throughout? Praising myself again – but 'against the author by partiality we are to set the probability of his having thought longer & more deeply on the subject[']*.*[34] (p. 347)

Female Beauty

In the longest single marginal note to the main text, Sara expands a short description of Queen Anthemmina—'Beautiful indeed were her blue eyes beneath black eyebrows' (p. 50)—into a critical reflection on female beauty. The annotation bears striking similarity to her early essay, 'On the Disadvantages Resulting from the Possession of Beauty' (1826).[35] Like her essay, the annotation confronts Romantic aesthetics of beauty with a female perspective, accounts for disparate standards of beauty, and ponders the relationship between imperfection and beauty. Here, and in numerous additional entries on women's physical traits, Sara shows how she applied her ongoing thinking about women, beauty, and Romantic aesthetics in order to construct female characters.

Whenever I summon Ideal Beauty before me[,][36] *she appears with blue eyes under long silken black lashes and eyebrows like arched threads of black silk – the profile Grecian rather than Roman, with an elegant massiveness and breadth, the complexion not warm & sunny, like that of Lord Byron's beauties, but freshly pink and white like a seashell newly cast-up from the ocean having a pearly whiteness & soft-blue veins like the streaks of the wood sorrel or the flecks upon the petals of the eye-bright. I believe this is rather a womanish conception, & that most men prefer a warmer style*

[33] Edwin Landseer (1802–1873) was a popular animal painter known particularly for his dramatic renderings of deer and stags in the wild.

[34] Sara paraphrases the opening of chapter 21 of *Biographia Literaria*: 'I know no claim, that the mere *opinion* of any individual can have to weigh down the opinion of the author himself; against the probability of whose parental partiality we ought to set that of his having thought longer and more deeply on the subject' (2:117). She misquotes portions of the text, suggesting that she writes from memory.

[35] Transcribed from the manuscript in Mudge, 187–200.

[36] Sara strikes out 'my eyes' and replaces with 'me.'

of beauty. The nearest approach to it that ever I saw was Mrs MacNiven a Genevese. I remember that the black silky hair which formed her lovely eyebrows was ill mannered enough to invade her upper lip, and all the boys in the place declared that the great beauty had a beard!

Nevertheless, beard or not, she seemed at 21 like a creature that had floated down from the sky and I still greatly prefer her style to Mrs Norton's, who seems to me, though beautiful, yet quite of the earth–earthy.[37] *There is none of that elemental purity about her which was so lovely in the Genevese, & her figure, though it has its own charm, is heavy, while Mrs. M's was elegance itself. She was about five foot seven & a half & slender. She wore a scarlet scarf over a white muslin robe, when I saw her first. I thought her haggard at thirty – & that little beard of hers has always struck me as an instance of the imperfection of real things. It was the natural accompaniment of those jetty brows, so like the rays of the pansy. By the bye what a fine microscopic eye for flowers Milton must have had in youth! What a dear he was to notice that the pansy was 'frecked with jet'.*[38] (pp. 50–55)

Women are more categorical and minute in their notices of female beauty than men. They look at it as they would at a flower, while men see more the living result, the engaging totality, the mind & person in one. (p. 179)

Summary of her Achievement

In the following note, Sara refers to earlier criticism of *Phantasmion*'s lack of an apparent moral, and re-articulates her previous defense.[39] Instead of a moral, she admits, her narrative wants a 'leading thought' to strengthen the story. Her critical defense continues to grapple with her Romantic lineage. Characterizing *Phantasmion* as Wordsworth's 'Lucy,' she aptly materializes the novel's complex reception, including its marginality, femininity, poetic inheritance, and creative independence.

I do not agree that this Tale is to be censored for wanting a set moral, but I feel that it wants a leading thought. It wanders on, not like a stream in a fixed channel, but like the waters of a rainflood, any where and everywhere. Still, I think, if it were not my own child, I should say, that there is some delicacy & grace in the execution – something of poetry in the conception of the parts. There is some merit too, as has been noticed, in the diction – which is upon the whole very pure & transparent & does not interfere with the fairyland effect. I owe this in part to my being born & bred among poets. For even Lord Byron could say – 'The Lake Poets are never vulgar'.[40] *We lived apart from the vulgarities of the citizen or the fashionable world, and had a mixed society composed of persons from the professional ranks or the old gentry of the land, mostly persons of taste & more or less of literature.*
But this has been a production which there were few to praise

[37] Sara likely refers to Caroline Norton (1808–1877), poet and social reformer.
[38] 'Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies, / The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine, / The white pink, and the pansy frecked with jet' in John Milton, 'Lycidas,' 142–44.
[39] *RSCT* 9–11.
[40] Sara first recorded this quote from Byron in an October 4, 1839 letter (*MLSC* 1:230).

And very few to love –[41]

Some warm lovers and praisers it has had in America.[42] *– but few here or any where care for a long poem in prose, the only aim of which is to present the beauty of nature to the mind's eye in a succession of pictures. S.C.*
June 20 1846. (pp. [390–91])

In an undated note that immediately follows this entry, Sara squeezes her most adamant claim to poetic autonomy into the final page of the back matter:

Hartley tells me that our dear friends at Rydal Mount think nought of this fairytale. Well there is not much in it – as a mind creation – but is it not rather curious & interesting as a mind-symptom? – as a psychological phenomenon – to express myself learnedly? – is it not the work of a poet's daughter if not of a poet? Yes! – I'll take upon me to say that no young woman in all England, that had not a poetic genius in her own right, & as it were of her very own, would have produced anything so like poetry, such a continuous uninterrupted web of soft & bright, though insignificant dreamery, who had not inherited a poetic temperament apart from creative power. But perhaps they think such a production should have been confined at least to my private circle – that it had no claim to be published. I wonder what my father would have said? He was wont to deliver very dispassionate non-parental judgments upon his children, and their productions – after they ceased to be little ones. He was fond & vain of us when we were mere appurtenances of himself – & sometimes said with a conceited air 'My dear! – all our children have fine eyes!'

I verily think that Hartley's Poems[43] *and even this little book might almost deserve to live as faint rays from the star of his genius.*

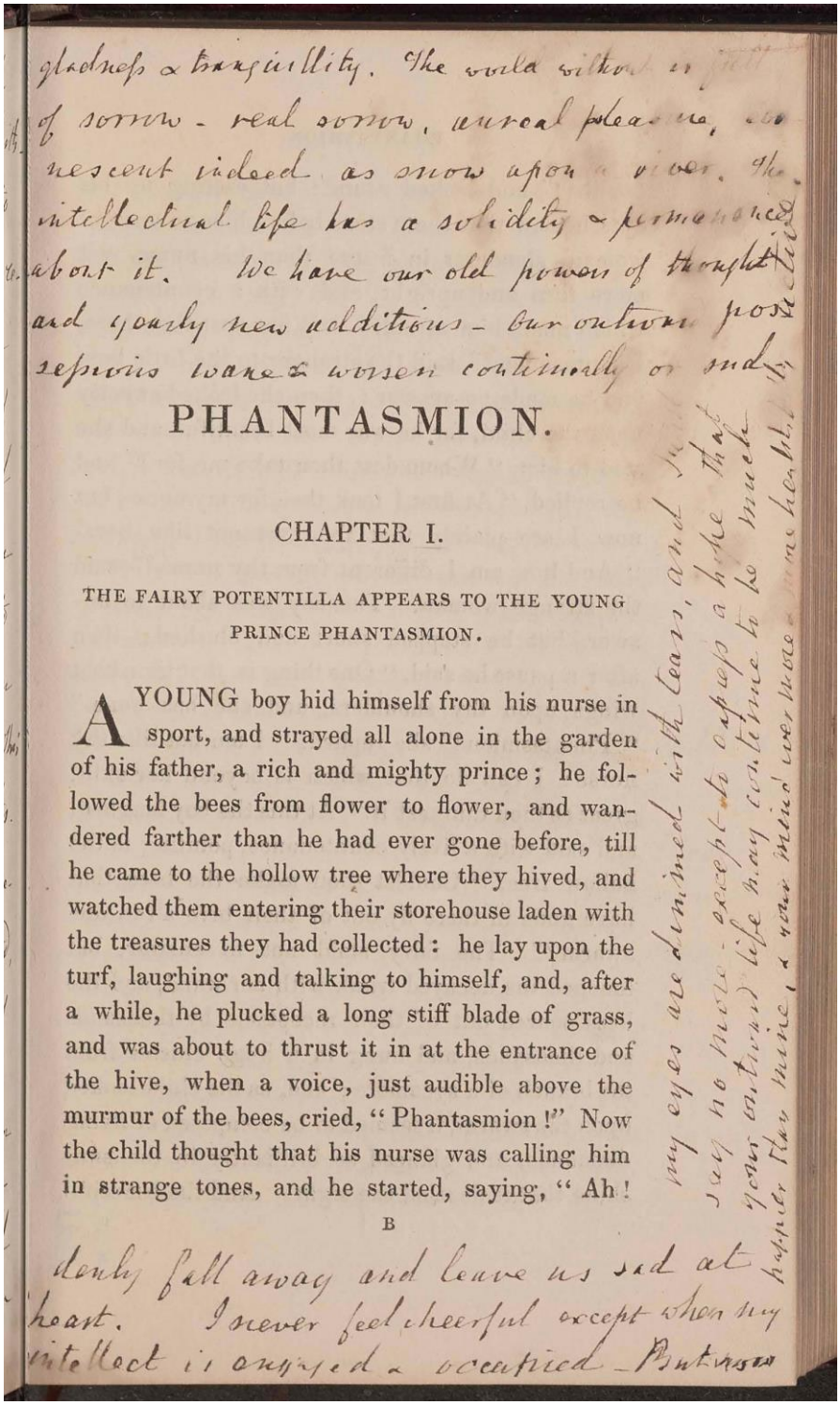
Well! – I own 'tis an elaborate trifle – this long fairy tale – but how many pleasant hours it gave me! – I owe it a debt of gratitude, trifle as it is to others. For me it is one among other monuments, that I have had my share of this world's enjoyments – O! how large a share compared with millions no worse deserving – yet what a drop in the Ocean of Desire even of earthly pleasure! (pp. [391–93])

At the time of its publication, she disparaged *Phantasmion* as a 'record of some of my recumbent amusements';[44] after returning to it, she commends it as something more monumental—a realization of a transcendent desire. The influence and imagined response of her father informs the note, but she recognizes an autonomy within this relationship that she had long sought to achieve. She claims *both* the status of a poet's daughter and of a poet in her own right, choosing to reconcile them by holding together her creative inheritance and autonomy.

Sara Coleridge's attentive re-reading of her novel develops from an explication of composition to an evaluative re-assessment of her achievement.

[41] 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways / Beside the springs of Dove / A maid whom there were none to praise / And very few to love' in William Wordsworth, 'She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways,' 1–4.
[42] See Barbeau, *Her Life and Thought*, 67–70, for further context on *Phantasmion*'s transatlantic reception.
[43] Hartley Coleridge, *Poems* (Leeds: F. E. Bingley, 1833).
[44] *RSCT* 8.

In eloquently written reflections, terse exclamations, and witty remarks, Sara weaves together the multiple and co-constitutive aspects of her private and public intellectual life to create an assertive testimony of her professional accomplishment. I have here presented only a sampling of notes; it remains a treasure trove of expressive, poignant, and informative details concerning Sara's life and authorship. Its further study promises to accelerate the building momentum in Sara Coleridge studies, and to fortify her legacy within nineteenth-century women's writing, within the fairy tale genre, and within Romantic and Victorian studies.



gladness & tranquillity. The world without is full of sorrow - real sorrow, unreal pleasure, evanescent indeed as snow upon a river. The intellectual life has a solidity & permanence about it. We have our old powers of thought and yearly new additions - our outward possessions wane & worsen continually & sad

PHANTASMION.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAIRY POTENTILLA APPEARS TO THE YOUNG PRINCE PHANTASMION.

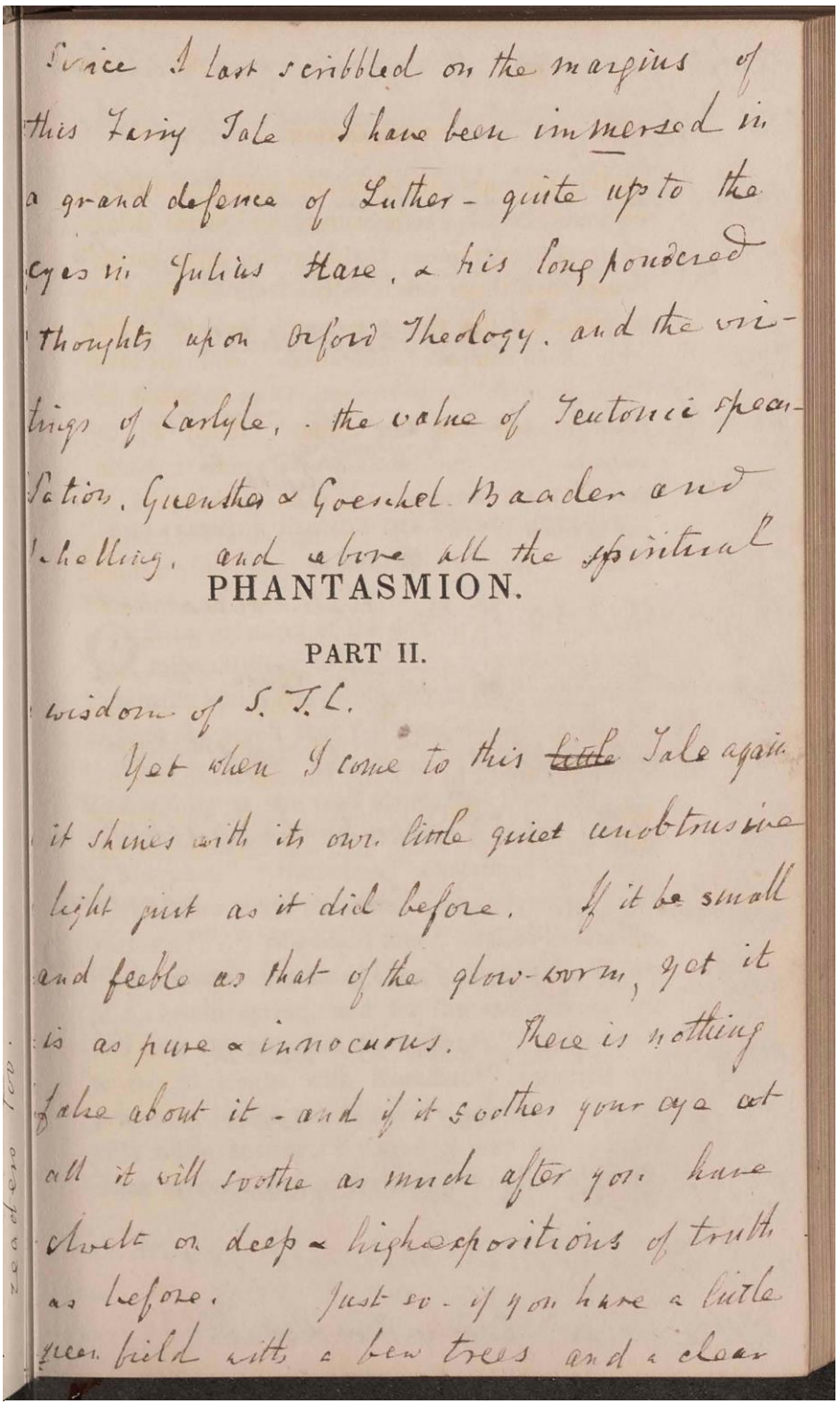
A YOUNG boy hid himself from his nurse in sport, and strayed all alone in the garden of his father, a rich and mighty prince; he followed the bees from flower to flower, and wandered farther than he had ever gone before, till he came to the hollow tree where they hived, and watched them entering their storehouse laden with the treasures they had collected: he lay upon the turf, laughing and talking to himself, and, after a while, he plucked a long stiff blade of grass, and was about to thrust it in at the entrance of the hive, when a voice, just audible above the murmur of the bees, cried, "Phantasmion!" Now the child thought that his nurse was calling him in strange tones, and he started, saying, "Ah!

B

my eyes are dimmed with tears, and I say no more - except to express a hope that your continued life may continue to be made happier than mine, & your mind ever more

dearly fall away and leave us sad at heart. I never feel cheerful except when my intellect is employed & occupied - But now

The close of the presentation note from Sara Coleridge to Aubrey de Vere in *Phantasmion*. London: William Pickering, 1837, 1. Rare Book Collection. The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Since I last scribbled on the margins of this Fairy Tale I have been immersed in a grand defence of Luther - quite up to the eyes in Julius Hare, & his long pondered thoughts upon Oxford Theology. and the writings of Carlyle, - the value of Teutonic speculation, Guenther & Goerschel Baader and Schelling, and above all the spiritual

PHANTASMION.

PART II.

wisdom of S. T. C.

Yet when I come to this ~~little~~ Tale again it shines with its own little quiet unobtrusive light just as it did before. If it be small and feeble as that of the glow-worm, yet it is as pure & innocuous. There is nothing false about it - and if it soothe your eye at all it will soothe as much after you have dwelt on deep & high expositions of truth as before. Just so - if you have a little green field with a few trees and a clear

A manuscript passage in the Part Two opener of the annotated *Phantasmion*. London: William Pickering, 1837, 133. Rare Book Collection. The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.