Coleridge Being Coleridge, or the Poet *Is* the Visionary

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When baseball's outfielder Manny Ramirez, the Bronx-born New Yorker and former Boston Red Sox rival of the New York Yankees, stepped up to home plate, baseball fans anticipated anything from a base hit to a homerun. This talented, dreadlocks-adorned baseball player drew as much attention to his baseball performance as he did to his memorable antics on the field or in the locker room. Known for his individualistic style, sports announcers dismissed his eccentric behavior as "Manny being Manny," referring both to his performance and his personality. Sometimes causing friction between him and his team management, Manny's idiosyncrasies, nevertheless, describe the kind of contradictory behavior easily recognized by others in the poetic genius of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both legendary figures in their fields. However, it is the language of poetry rather than baseball acumen that distinguishes Coleridge's nature. His characteristic definition of the word 'imagination' as a duality of the fancy and divine individualizes his style as a poet as he struggles to reconcile religious and philosophical conflicts in his life through a pursuit of domestic happiness.

Among the many critics who have endeavored to explain Coleridge's personality and poetic genius, John B. Beer most accurately describes Coleridge's idiosyncratic nature as an insatiable desire for the diversity of knowledge. Similar to John Keats's idea of negative capability, Coleridge's diversity of mind encourages a broad spectrum of beliefs that produce his contradictory nature. He is unwilling to sacrifice one belief for another for the sake of certainty, risking his own personal discomfort rather than achieving resolution. Coleridge has been described as both the imaginative poet and the moralizing theologian, dual aspects of his nature.[1] Beer notes that to separate our view of Coleridge into "a dichotomy between Coleridge the poet and Coleridge the religious thinker… involves a total misunderstanding of his position," but to resolve a misinterpretation one needs to recognize this poetic genius as a "visionary."[2] Despite this dilemma, a further study of Coleridge's stability as a poet and as an individual will shed light on how Coleridge defines himself through the imagination pursuing unity through sublime language while expressing his worldly concerns in a transcendent form of poetry. Building on Beer's dichotomy of Coleridge as poet and religious thinker, I suggest that Coleridge's role as domestic partner further complements my interpretation of his eccentricities.

From his study of Emanuel Kant's philosophical treatise *Critique of Pure*

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[1] These two aspects of Coleridge's nature, the poet and the theologian, are suggested by Stephen Potter as the two Coleridges in John B. Beer's discussion on Coleridge and Romanticism. Beer draws a comparison between Keats and Coleridge to show a similarity of thinking: ". . . Keats did not deny to Coleridge the possession of Negative Capability, or feel that his mind was a 'select party'." *Coleridge the Visionary* (New York: 1959) pp. 30-31.

[2] In an extensive discussion of how Coleridge shaped Romanticism, John Beer explains the gulf between the religious belief of man's origin, that man was made in God's image, and the philosophical belief that man's suffering exists as some "spiritual disease" resistant to redemption. *Coleridge the Visionary* (New York: Collier Books, 1959) p. 32.

Reason, along with his reading of other German philosophers,[3] Coleridge formulated an alternative definition of the imagination that distinguishes it from the familiar idea of creativity to one of deeper philosophical import. With this understanding he coined the term *"'Esemplastic.' 'The word,' "* he states, *" 'is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere' "*[4] (*BL* I 168). In his attempt to reconcile the philosophic, religious, and poetic power of the imaginative faculty with reason and understanding, or the ideal with the real, Coleridge explains, "I constructed it myself from the Greek words, . . . [meaning] *to shape into one* [italics mine]; because, having to convey a new sense, I thought that a new term would both aid the recollection of my meaning, and prevent its being confounded with the usual import of the word, imagination"[5] (*BL* I 169-170). He further applies the term *plastic* to his poetry in his phrase "one intellectual breeze" as a vast and sweeping movement of "organic Harps"[6] ("The Eolian Harp"). In this sense Coleridge's definition of the word 'imagination' individualizes his style as a poet and shapes his personal experience in his effort to unify the fancy with the divine. A unification of his organic or creative expression with his philosophical understanding of the transcendent pervades his roles in life equally as much as in his poetics. Just as he struggles to reconcile the form according to Kant and the essence of ideas according to Platonic rationalism in his poetics, he also struggles to reconcile human affection, commitment, and responsibility in his relationships. As Paul Cheshire describes in his thoughtful synthesis of Coleridge's nature, and as I further explore here, there are three central yet "contending aspects of Coleridge—*the lover* who is anticipating domestic contentment; *the philosopher* who is approaching a vision of the One; *the Christian* who holds such philosophising 'vain' and 'never guiltless' unless it is subordinated to reverence and obedience to God" [italics mine].[7]

Searching for Coleridge, the lover, in his relationships and his writings reveals his inability to achieve domestic happiness. Through the symbolic language of the poet and the religious faith of the theologian, Coleridge pursues happiness as a virtue. For Coleridge to be Coleridge, he embraces his understanding of the divine through the imagination, his language of love. His search for an ideal companion—as wife, friend, and lover—can be found through the symbolic language embedded in his poetry. J. Robert Barth concurs with M. H. Abrams in his assessment that the romantic poets use the word " 'love' for the whole range of human relationships." Barth suggests that Coleridge's reflections on love show that "love is, or should be, an instinctive movement of our nature," and both these critics agree that Coleridge's

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[3] In his exploration of the philosophical imagination, Coleridge was also influenced by Maass, Schelling, Tetens, and Fichte as well as Kant. The phrase "plastic power" is derived from his study of German terms which express the perceptions of the human and the divine. Other poets applied the term plastic to the shaping of the imagination but Coleridge is credited with having coined the term esemplastic to redefine the creative nature of the imagination as a unifying agent of the human mind. For a more detailed explanation see BL I 168-170.

[4] BL I 168

[5] BL I 169-170

[6] PW *115* 45-47

[7] See Paul Cheshire's "The Eolian Harp." *The Coleridge Bulletin.* New Series 17 (NS) Summer 2001, pp. 1-2.

paradigm for love is friendship, an intense form of friendship but one inseparable from love of wife, brother, sister, husband, friend, and individual.[8] Moreover, Beer acknowledges,

> Light became for Coleridge a central symbol second only to love in its power to bind together disparate strands of his thinking… At one point he is noting that the light from two candles held together is greater than the light from two candles held separately, and storing this up as a symbol for marriage.[9]

Yet, in his pursuit of women Coleridge vacillates in his emotions and passions as evidenced in his 'love' relationships, especially with Mary Evans, Sara Fricker, and Sara Hutchinson, those women more closely examined in this essay. Unable to satisfy his romantic longings as he had hoped with each of these women, he turns instead to romanticize his feelings through the sublime language of his poetry.

As Coleridge tells Mary Evans, on whom he focused his early passions, in a letter dated 22 February 1792, "*Writing long letters* is not the fault, into whi[ch] I am most apt to fall—but whenever I do, by some inexplic[ab]le ill luck, my prolixity is always directed to those, whom I would yet least of all wish to torment."[10] Apologizing for his long-windedness, Coleridge insists on rewarding her patience with a poem by Bowles contained within the letter, a sign of his fond intimacy for Mary as she must "travel through my long long long letter" in order to discover the sensibilities of hope and fortitude described in the poem. Coleridge unsuccessfully directs Mary's attention away from the unstable man to his poetic ideals of hope and fortitude. When she rejects Coleridge's romantic inclinations and ridicules his Pantisocratic scheme, the despairing Coleridge writes to Robert Southey,

> I loved her, Southey! almost to madness. Her Image was never absent from me for three Years—for *more* than three Years.—My Resolution has not faltered—but I want a Comforter.—I have done nothing—I have gone into Company—I was constantly at the Theatre here till they left us—I endeavored to be perpetually with Miss Brunton—I even hoped, that her Exquisite Beauty and uncommon Accomplishments might have cured one Passion by another.[11]

Coleridge's attachment to an idealistic world of love is his constancy while the inconstancy of his personal feelings shift from Mary Evans to Miss Brunton, a woman of the theatre. Sometime later, Coleridge bemoans his loss of Mary

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[8] For a more complete discussion of how Coleridge and the Romantic poets define love in their lives and poetry, see J. Robert Barth's essay on "Coleridge's Ideal of Love" in *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 24 (Spring 1985), pp. 114-115.

[9] Beer, p. 57. In a notebook entry of 1795 Coleridge describes these two candles separate and then together along with a symbol of Hymen, god of marriage; CN I 13 G.5.

[10] CL I 31-32

[11] CL I 113

Evans, seen as his unrequited ideal love, even while engaged to Sara Fricker. Furthermore, he is uncertain how to express any affection toward Sara, "whom I do not love—but whom by every tie of Reason and Honor I ought to love."[12] His passion for love rises and falls with his desire to attain a utopian environment, creating a society in which marriage serves the higher good, fulfilling a duty while suppressing his personal feelings. Coleridge writes, "All necessary knowledge in the Branch of Ethics is comprised in the Word Justice—that the Good of the whole is the Good of each Indiv[id]ual,"as he explains to Southey how his duty to marriage is the unifying aspect of their Pantisocratic scheme.[13]

Coleridge's adherence to duty, honoring the sacrament of marriage, inhibits him from experiencing a satisfying relationship. His moral duty supersedes his desires as he appeals to his imagination to reconcile the two. In his opening lines of "Absence: A Poem," a first draft written in August 1792, Coleridge locates the power of the poetic imagination within the emblem of woman as the center of his affections: "Imagination, mistress of my lore! / Where shall mine eye thy elfin haunt explore?"[14] He is more in love with the imagination than he is with a flesh and blood woman. His gaze turns from the desires of his heart to those of his imagination. With this early feminization of the imagination as mistress, Coleridge establishes a poetic motif, the personification of which will continue to pervade his imagined relationships with women in his poetry as friend, lover, and wife. An investigation of this philosophic view apparent in the lines of several selected poems presented here will show how Coleridge embraces the symbolic woman that exists within his own imagination and also in his experience through a variety of socially-constructed roles. Just as Coleridge sets out to allegorize the imagination in his definitions of the primary and the secondary, through divine symbolism in the former, and in the latter the fancy, he conceives of the female presence not only as a literal object but also as a symbolic idea. From this perspective we can understand his distinction between the universe acting in harmony with the deliberations of the human mind and the capacity of the human mind as creator.

W. Jackson Bate, co-editor of the current edition of *Biographia Literaria,* refutes the critical perspective that Coleridge "… regarded the poetic imagination as merely an 'echo' of a capacity common to us all."[15] Instead, he argues, "The primary imagination is rather the highest exertion of the imagination that the 'finite mind' has to offer; and its scope… necessarily includes universals which lie beyond the restricted field of the 'secondary' imagination."[16] Bate's perspective captures the object within the imagination

[12] CL I 114

[13] CL I 114

[14] PW *60* 1-2

[15] Jonathan Wordsworth . "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being." *Coleridge's Imagination.* Eds. Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn, and Nicholas Roe. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 24.

[16] A more elaborate discussion of Bate's critical perspective can be found in his essay "Coleridge on the Function of Art," *Perspectives of Criticism,* XX (Cambridge, Mass., 1950) p. 145. See Wordsworth, p. 24.

and its symbolic counterpart. This relationship between the object and symbol also applies to Coleridge's interpretation of any 'woman'. Coleridge's distinction between these two functions of the imagination offers stability to his illusive ideal of womanhood. As Bate suggests, "For reality, as he had emphasized, is to be found in neither the universal nor the particular as such, but in the process of fulfillment where each declares the other; and value and concreteness, the 'ideal' and the 'real', become one in mutual substantiation."[17] Bate explains that Coleridge achieves to a degree the kind of unity between the universal and the particular of which the imagination is capable.

Coleridge begins to compose Effusion XXXV on 20 August 1795, at Clevedon, Somersetshire, where he and his wife Sara honeymoon after their marriage on 4 October that same year, and where his domestic feelings surrounding their home become the focus of his poetic imagination, once again mingling his love of nature, the divine ideal of love, and a love relationship. Variations on this composition resulted in the poem entitled "The Eolian Harp" which he continued to revise in 1796, 1797, and 1803.[18] In his analysis of these variants Cheshire shows the evolution of the poem and its prothalamial theme through its sequential changes and, as he asserts, these changes themselves become a form of poetry.[19] From his reading of the *Rugby MS Draft 1,* Cheshire writes, "Coleridge, anticipating marriage with Sara, is at last able to experience and express sexual desire as a divinely sanctioned marriage sacrament."[20] Coleridge's anticipation of this sublime celebration affirms his hesitation of the forthcoming joyous event and his later disappointment in unfulfilled affections. His marriage to Sara on 4 October 1795 and his scheme of Pantisocracy with Southey weigh heavily on his thoughts as evidenced by his notebook entries during this time and his letters to Thomas Poole and Robert Southey in October and November of that same year. In one of his notebook entries (CN I 51), Coleridge composes several lines referencing sounds of the sea, melodies of the birds of Paradise, and murmurings around the flowers which are later transfigured into the following lines:

> Such a soft floating witchery of sound
> As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
> Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
> Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
> Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
> Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing![21]

Here Coleridge focuses on a paradox of sounds, harmonizing the silence of the

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[17] W. Jackson Bate. *Coleridge.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970) p. 158.

[18] "The Eolian Harp" was originally composed on August 20th, 1795, as Effusion XXXV, and published in 1796. Later compositions are dated 1797 and 1803 with publication in *Sibylline Leaves* dated 1817, 1828, 1829, 1834, as noted in PW 16, 2, 316.

[19] Paul Cheshire. "The Eolian Harp." *The Coleridge Bulletin* New Series 17 (NS) Summer 2001, p. 2.

[20] Cheshire, p. 6.

[21] PW *115* 20-25

senses with the awakening of the imagination. He hears the soft and elusive sounds of the elfins, the gentle winds of make-believe, and the noiseless activities of flowers and birds uniting within his poetic mind as rhythms of light and sound bringing him joy:

> 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— (26-29)

In his admiration for nature's offerings in everything from the breeze to the sea, he ascribes a coalescence of sounds that take on a life of their own while imparting these rhythms to himself and his beloved Sara as she rests her head pensively on his arm:

> My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
> Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
> To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown
> With white-flowered Jasmin, and the broad-leaved Myrtle,
> (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!) (1-5)

Coleridge identifies with nature's representations of gentle beauty as he does with the serenity of his wife Sara's presence by his side; both are "emblems" of innocence and love in their essence and existence. The intellectual breeze of bewitching sounds moves through the imagination and the heart as the gentle, imperceptible presence of Elfins journey from Fairy-Land to reinforce the shaping spirit of the imagination, or *esemplastic* unity of the poetic mind.

Complications in Coleridge's romantic feelings, however, continually arise throughout his life. His vacillation and second-guessing of his love for Sara, and other women, show his confusion over understanding romantic love, friendship, and domestic happiness. In a later notebook entry of 1795 Coleridge emphasizes his thoughts on ideal marriage with reference to John Milton's Book IV of *Paradise Lost* when he writes, "Marriage—sole Propriety [/] In Paradise"[22] (CN I 79 G.73). He shows his admiration for the poetic imagination of Milton as he exalts and praises the ideal of married love. Milton writes,

> Hail wedded Love, mysterious Law, true source
> Of human offspring, sole propriety
> In Paradise of all things common else.[23]

Even as Coleridge exalts the ideal of marriage, he struggles to unify the

[22] Kathleen Coburn shows how Coleridge's notes on marriage link to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in her explication of his notebooks. See CN I 79.

[23] John Milton. *Paradise Lost* Book IV. *The Longman Anthology of British Literature.* Gen. Ed. David Damrosch (New York: Longman, 2000) pp. 750-52.

particular human relationship with the universal as he contemplates the duty of marriage and its covenant. The tension between the ideal and the real love relationship produces the suffering Coleridge experiences over conflicted emotions.

Just one year earlier in December 1794, several days after receiving his rejection from Mary Evans, Coleridge writes to Southey, "I had placed her in the sanctuary of my Heart, nor can she be torn from thence but with the Strings that grapple it to Life… He cannot be long wretched who dares be actively virtuous."[24] Willing to exchange his personal desires and affection for the virtues of duty and obedience, Coleridge commits himself to marriage while bemoaning an uncertain future with Sara. He confesses his emotional despair to Southey reinforcing his emotional turmoil and confusion over human affections in conflict with his moral commitment:

> Love makes all things pure and heavenly like itself:—but to marry a woman whom I do *not* love—to degrade her, whom I call my Wife, by making her the Instrument of low Desire—and on the removal of a desultory Appetite, to be perhaps not displeased with her Absence!—Enough!—These Refinements are the wildering Fires, that lead me into Vice.[25]

Yet, despite his protests against a woman he will later declare his undying love for, Coleridge moves forward with the marriage, perhaps as some critics have avowed because of Southey's urging to honor his commitment. After a year has passed, Coleridge settles into the comfort of his higher ideal. For now, Sara *is* Coleridge's representation of exalted love, the object of his poetic imagination, in its paradisiacal state, and as his poetic muse she is, for the moment, his inspiration to attain unity with God. Through his Christian duty and philosophical search for oneness, Coleridge exercises his free will to achieve a moral triumph over his passions. He tells his neighbor and friend Poole, in his letter of 7 October 1795,

> On Sunday Morning I was *married*—at St. Mary's, Red Cliff—poor Chatterton's Church-- / The thought gave me a tinge of melancholy to the solemn Joy, which I felt—united to the woman, whom I love best of all created Beings.—We are settled—nay—quite domesticated at Clevedon—Our comfortable Cot!—!—.[26]

As Coleridge's passion for his wife wanes and he distances himself from domestic happiness, his commitment to marriage, as a sacred relationship, remains a constant ideal though it does not resolve his religious and philosophical uncertainties. While Coleridge confesses his love for his wife in

[24] CL I 145
[25] CL I 145
[26] CL I 160

the first part of his letter, he then immediately turns to a description of his appetite for writing poetry. His search to reconcile his fleshly appetites with his spiritual needs drives Coleridge to pursue his desires through the awe and terror of the sublime, gazing on an ideal object with melancholy and joy. Nature, the object of his hungry Eye (and eye is capitalized), feeds his poetic imagination. He describes the landscape before his view: "The prospect around us is perhaps more *various* than any in the kingdom—Mine Eye gluttonizes.—The Sea—the distant Islands!—the opposite Coasts!—I shall assuredly write Rhymes—let the nine Muses prevent it, if they can—/."[27] More concerned with feeding his eye (intellectual hunger) than his heart through his mind's eye or imagination, Coleridge shows how poetry excites his inner feelings rather than his outward affections for his wife. He recognizes this paradox in another notebook entry during this time period. He writes, "Poetry—excites us to artificial feelings—makes us callous to real ones."[28] Through poetry he equates nature and his domestic love with its ability to reveal Hope and Fortitude, Christian values that permeate his religious and philosophical beliefs like the ones he described in his letter to Mary Evans three years earlier. Coleridge must depart from the mundane and ordinary in life to feed his intellectual and spiritual desires. His failed relationship with his wife Sara turns his gaze back to his poetic imagination where he can once again stabilize himself and pursue his desires for Sara Hutchinson.

In his human relationships Coleridge suffers disappointments as his hopes for planned communal living are abandoned. His pursuit of the sublime and his desire to linger in the beauty of a utopian scheme distort his views on domestic life and marriage. His radical scheme of Pantisocracy and relationship with Mary Evans are both failed attempts at happiness; she had warned Coleridge to give up his foolishness in 1794. Shortly thereafter, his partner in this Pantisocratic endeavor, Southey, considered taking a position in the church or the law withdrawing from the plans he had devised with Coleridge.[29] In his letter to Southey written on 13 November 1795, Coleridge exclaims, "Southey! I *have* 'lost Friends'—Friends who still cherish for me Sentiments of high Esteem and unextinguished Tenderness."[30] His desire for spiritual unity is fulfilled through the only avenue open to him, the literary sublime, where he finds happiness in poetry but mourns his poverty of affection. Coleridge's identities as lover, philosopher, and Christian are each situated within his expression of the literary sublime. Anthony John Harding acknowledges that the idea of human relationship existed for Coleridge as a coherent concept; however, one of the "manifestations" of this idea can be found in "the essentiality of love, which is part of the striving of the individual towards the 'one Life'," creating a union of the philosophical principle of oneness with human love. Poetry offers itself as the natural expression of the essentiality of

[27] CL I 160
[28] CN I 87
[29] CL I 166
[30] CL I 163

love through the language of the sublime used by the poet.[31]

With Coleridge's growing discontent in his marriage and increasing tension in literary friendships as with William Wordsworth, he turns again to experience the sublime in his writing. In Coleridge's poetic imagery of women as in his description of nature, the sublime expression of these images achieves a unity he fails to achieve in his life. From the symbolic woman of his poetic imagination to the wife he marries in hope of achieving his Pantisocratic ideal, Coleridge continues to search for his poetic companion. George Whalley asks a probing question and one worth considering in understanding Coleridge's relationships with women. It is evident that for one reason or another—human inadequacies, competitive friendships, and even financial and social pressures— Coleridge experiences traumatic separations from those he cares for the most, Robert Southey, Sara Fricker, and Sara Hutchinson. Whalley asks,

> Could it be that, beyond the 'imaginative' surface of the poems Coleridge was known to have written to or about Sara [H], Sara [H] had been overmastered by the sterner rhythms of life; that these had swept over her not only with ineluctable force, but also with a certain blessed rectitude—readjusting the patterns of desire to the shape of a complex actual world, healing raw wounds and intolerable paradoxes not with oblivion simply but with the sanity of clear-sighted acceptance? (xv).[32]

The complexities of daily life, balancing family needs with literary endeavors, are those "sterner rhythms of life" that for Coleridge "swept over her" (Sara H) with a force that produces the "intolerable" and irresolvable paradoxes in his experience.

Coleridge looks for his resolution to life's paradoxes in a relationship with Sara Hutchinson where he finds a sympathetic listener and attentive friend with whom he can share his poetic writing and his passion. These passions are more fully explored in discussions of the erotic Coleridge, perhaps his darker side, in Anya Taylor's book *The Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law Against Divorce* and in Graham Davidson's article "Springs, Fountains and Volcanoes." Davidson argues, "… Coleridge struggled all his life with the competing energies of body and soul, a competition which, unresolved, disordered his love."[33] His ten-year friendship with Sara Hutchinson is fraught with vacillating emotions. At times his feelings burst forth with moments of unfulfilled desire as described in his notebook entry of 1807, while he is also battling a severe opium addiction. He writes,

> Could I feel for a moment the supremacy of Love suspended in my nature, by the accidents of temporary Desire; were I conscious for a

[31] See Anthony John Harding's *Coleridge and the Idea of Love* for a fuller explanation of these manifestations of Coleridge's idea of human relationship. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) p. 5.

[32] George Whalley. *Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson and the Asra Poems* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955) p. xv.

[33] See Graham Davidson's "Springs, Fountains and Volcanoes" for a more detailed discussion of the erotic Coleridge. *The Coleridge Bulletin* New Series 31 (NS) Summer 2008, pp. 55-72.

> moment of an Interregnum in the Heart, were the Rebel to sit on the *Throne* of my Being, even tho' it were only that the rightful Lord of my Bosom were sleeping, soon to awake & expel the Usurper, I should feel myself as much fallen & as unworthy of her Love in any such tumult of Body indulged towards her… (CN II 2984)

Coleridge's conflicting desires remain unresolved as his intense love for Sara Hutchinson gives way to spiritual friendship.

In the third verse of his poem "Dejection: An Ode" written on 4 April 1802, first as a personal letter to Sara Hutchinson and several months later published as an ode, Coleridge writes of failing spirits:

> I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.[34]

He tells of a new and old moon, a new earth and new heaven, of joy and distress, of the virtuous and pure as he addresses womanhood repeatedly as "O Lady!" Throughout the eight verses of the poem this Lady is addressed directly five times, once as a "virtuous Lady!" and in the final stanza as "Dear Lady!" Coleridge substitutes "Lady" for Sara in his published version of the poem although her name is repeated more frequently in the original. His repetition of a direct address to Sara, the lady, demonstrates Coleridge's rhythmic form, echoing Scriptural poetry and appealing to her sympathetic heart. Asra, the name Coleridge uses to distinguish Sara's name from his wife Sara, is an anagram Coleridge transliterated into Hebrew and Greek characters with the initial letter in Hebrew.[35] Connecting Sara Hutchinson to his poetry through the Hebrew alphabet raises his view of her to an immortal vision that blends with the mortal, characterizing the essence of woman as virtue, both as a holy description and a moral one.[36] As Tim Fulford remarks in a fuller discussion of the personal Sara and the poetic lady, "It was his last serious attempt in poetry to make a personal need for unity into a social ethic, directed towards an existing domestic circle, and offered to the reading public."[37] Through the variations of the poem written by Coleridge, he ordains the intimacies of his personal life as the priesthood of his poetic imagination, and yet he stifles these intimacies just as his poetic genius is stifled by his misfortunes:

> But oh! each visitation
> Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,

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[34] PW *293* 45-46

[35] Whalley, p. 20.

[36] Coleridge's transliteration of Sara's name into Hebrew and Greek letters appears in her manuscript book titled *Sarah Hutchinson's Poets* into which she had transcribed a number of poems by Coleridge and Wordsworth. Sara's name follows an introductory fragment for Coleridge's poem "The Devil's Thoughts." Coleridge writes, "A Fragment from the Wreck of Memory.—originally revealed to Southey and STC [their names written in Greek characters] to which is now added The Angel's Thoughts as thought by Seraph Sara [her name written in Hebrew and Greek characters]." Whalley, p. 20.

[37] Tim Fulford. *Coleridge's Figurative Language* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) p. 76.

My shaping spirit of Imagination.[38]

Coleridge's poetic effusions and intellectual musings sweep over his relationships interspersing his poetry with the fluctuations of love, loss, and hope. His poetic imagination defined by outward forms and inward passions is tempered by Coleridge's religious orthodoxy and philosophical principles. The configurations of his intellectual studies find expression in his poetry through a literary sublime that speaks to both the beauty and terror that dominated Coleridge's poems and his life. Recognizing the difficulty in explaining the individuality of Coleridge, Whalley acknowledges, "Coleridge's preoccupations and interests were numerous, persistent, and prismatic,"[39] further echoing Beer's description of Coleridge's various and complex nature. His idiosyncrasies define the poetic genius of Coleridge; however, his romantic relationships with Mary Evans, Sara Fricker, and Sara Hutchinson, as well as his friendships, reveal the instability of his life experience, while his poetry shows a persistent struggle to create balance in his life. His notes reveal what Coleridge treasured most, imagination and its inspiration of love, Coleridge being Coleridge: "As when the Taper's white cone of Flame is seen double, till the eye moving brings them into one space; & there they become one—so did the Idea in my imagination coadunate with your present Form / soon after I first gazed on you with love."[40] For Coleridge, the double images of the flame move closer to become one flame just as his concept of an ideal love unites with the physicality of woman. Through the language of the sublime, Coleridge mingles nature and domestic happiness in a re-vision of the imagination.[41]

[38] PW *293* 84-86

[39] Whalley, p. xvi.

[40] Whalley, p. 66. See note where Whalley cites Thomas M. Raysor's essay, "Coleridge and 'Asra'" from *Studies in Philology,* XXVI (1929), 302-24; N 11, ff25v-26.

[41] My appreciation to Graham Davidson for his insightful comments that substantially contributed to my revision of this article.