Coleridge and Tipsy Joy

Stacey McDowell[1]

WILLIAM HAZLITT'S famous description of Wordsworth as having 'a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face' ties-in with an impression of the poet as someone with a rather restrained sense of humour.[2] Coleridge, on the other hand, seems far more given to mirth; where in his notebooks, letters and in anecdotal accounts he often sinks into dejection and despair, at other times he can be quick in the attempt to rouse himself out of such moods, to shake them off and laugh at himself. In their collection, *The Lyrical Ballads*, comedy or light relief seems to feature rarely. There is the macabre humour of 'We are Seven' or the gentle bathos of 'The Idiot Boy', but here humour is felt more as an undercurrent; it permits of a bittersweet or wry smile rather than prompting any 'convulsive inclination to laughter'. In Coleridge's poem 'The Nightingale', however, the balancing of mirth and melancholy is key as Coleridge seeks to replace the sorrowful associations typically connected to the bird's song with ones of joy. He seeks to eschew a literary, second-hand response in favour of an unmediated responsiveness to the bird's song and to nature in general. But in doing so through his own literary response, and in a poem, moreover, which resounds with allusions to other poems, Coleridge acknowledges with irony how difficult it is to shake free of the literary tradition in which his consciousness is steeped, or to prevent the pervasive feelings of sorrow from encroaching upon any present moment of happiness. 'Like tipsy joy that reels with tossing head' is how Coleridge describes the bird's song in one of the most ebullient, animated passages in the poem. This epithet seems to suggest at once the possibility for intoxicating, reeling, convulsive delight in the bird's song, and to hint that such joy might be achievable only through a state of consciousness in which everything else is balanced out, and thus to reveal just how precarious is that tempering of joy and sorrow that the poem seeks to maintain.[3]

I'm thinking of 'tipsy' partly in a drunken sense here, but more so in terms of how the giddy delight felt in representing the bird's song might be conceived of as a kind of 'tipsy poetics'. If the bird's song represents an unalloyed, unselfconscious mode of expression, Coleridge's poem questions how the self-consciousness of lyric expression negotiates extremes of passion. The question of what poetry should have to do with a poet's emotions is one of the concerns that Wordsworth sets out in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. According to the famous formulation, 'poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', qualified and properly balanced by 'emotion recollected in

[1] I am very grateful to the Friends of Coleridge for the invitation to speak on this subject at the Autumn Study Weekend, 2012. I owe particular thanks to David Fairer and to Graham Davidson for their insightful comments.

[2] William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto, J. M. Dent, 1930-4), XVII, p. 118. For an overview of assumptions about Wordsworth's lack of humour and a qualifying account of the significance of laughter in his poetry, see Matthew Bevis, 'Wordsworth at Play', *Essays in Criticism,* 61.1 (2011), 54-78.

[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem', *Poetical Works*, I, Poems (Reading Text), ed. by J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

tranquillity'.[4] But what I wish to focus on in thinking about a poetry of tipsy joy is something Wordsworth mentions just a few lines before this where he claims that 'the end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure'.[5] (And there's a subtle difference between *over*balancing and *un*balancing, I think; though both describe the same effect, one occurs through lack, the other through excess.) Wordsworth continues, 'there is some danger that the pleasure be carried beyond its proper bounds', and thus he emphasises the need for metrical language to achieve: 'a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions'.[6] Wordsworth's sense of poetry as a kind of tempering and intermingling of passions might take 'tempering' to mean at once 'to arrange or keep in due measure, to mingle in due proportion', as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, and 'to keep within limits, to regulate, restrain'. Particularly suggestive within this context is the less common usage, 'to bring into harmony, attune'. Poetry, then, produces a sense of delight that tempers the painful elements of deep passion, while that delight, in turn, is balanced by the painful passions and by the harmonising measure of verse. Coleridge similarly emphasises this tempering of passions when discussing Wordsworth's account of metre in the *Biographia Literaria*, where he describes the potential for the workings of poetic expression to bring about 'the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion'.[7] Yet Coleridge is more alert, I think, to the elusiveness of that balance, and the elusiveness of poetry itself, whose effects are no more amenable to being duly tempered than are the effects of passion.

In 'The Nightingale' the effort to balance or temper the deeper passions (in this case those of joy or sorrow) is aimed at through a self-conscious form of poetry whose formal complexities, propensity for wordplay and allusion and odd shifts in tone all attest to the precariousness of that balance. It is not simply that a natural response is privileged over an aesthetic one, or that the bird's unself-conscious song trumps self-conscious poetry (although at times this seems to be the case), since such a position gets one nowhere. Instead, Coleridge considers alternative ways of listening to the bird's song and modifying his poetic response in and through his poem in a kind of aesthetic 'retraining'. He initially records hearing the bird's song on a calm, balmy evening and being moved to reject the traditional associations of melancholy, before drifting into a reverie in which he recalls a grove populated with nightingales and an enigmatic maid who dwells there and who listens to the birds' song and responds intuitively to their joyfulness. The poem ends with Coleridge's hope that his son will learn to associate the night and the nightingale's song with joy. I wish to trace the poem's vacillations in tone when outlining these various responses as it complicates distinctions between a

[4] William Wordsworth, 'Preface' (1802), *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), p. 82.
[5] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 80.
[6] Wordsworth, Preface, p. 83.
[7] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 64.

natural and aesthetic response, between unconscious song and self-conscious poetry, and between opposing extremes of emotion. Throughout, I want to be thinking about how Coleridge works through a kind of 'tipsy poetics' whose metrical harmony precariously balances spontaneous joy with a more reflective, pensive note.

Adam Potkay suggests that Coleridge 'dismissed any hope for joy in his own life except for what he could find through imagining the immediate joys of others, especially beings very unlike himself—pure maidens and young children'.[8] This seems to be the case in 'The Nightingale', where the sense of immediate joy in the bird's song is granted to a 'gentle maid' who listens as they sing in a dark woodland grove near a castle. The scene would be familiar in any literary romance, which seems at odds with the fact that up until this point in the poem Coleridge has been seeking to eschew tired literary tropes and restore the immediacy of response. The maid is a mysterious presence in the poem. She remains an imaginative figure, unlike the actual companionship of Wordsworth and Dorothy, whose presence suggests that Coleridge's joy must first be conceived in and through poetic meditation. For the maid, however, joy takes her unawares—as is suggested by the poem's carefully-managed temporality that preserves a sense of novelty and surprise by having the maid, despite her familiarity with the bird's song, hear it suddenly burst forth after a spell of silence:

> [...] she knows all their notes,
> That gentle Maid! and oft a moment's space,
> What time the Moon was lost behind a cloud,
> Hath heard a pause of silence; till the Moon
> Emerging, hath awaken'd earth and sky
> With one sensation, and these wakeful Birds
> Have all burst forth in choral ministrelsy,
> As if one quick and sudden Gale had swept
> An hundred airy harps! And she hath watch'd
> Many a Nightingale perch giddily
> On blosmy twig still swinging from the breeze,
> And to that motion tune his wanton song
> Like tipsy joy that reels with tossing head. (ll. 74-86)

It's hard not to smile when reading these lines, and the poem itself seems to be barely suppressing its joy in the nightingale's song (and in its own song), as though 'too happy' in the bird's happiness (in Keats's famous address to the nightingale).[9] It is the possibility of being too happy, this overmuchness of giddy delight or 'tipsy joy' that I am struck by in this passage. For the force of the song, tuning itself to the motion of the breeze and in harmony with nature, makes felt the bird's all-suffusing pleasure in its own singing and in its being in nature, but it nonetheless sets the bird giddily swinging. As the bird's song is attuned to this precarious motion, so the verse falls in line with its rhythm: the

[8] Adam Potkay, *The Story of Joy: From the Bible to Late Romanticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 141.
[9] John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale', *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), l. 6.

way that the stress falls keeps the reader momentarily perched on the word 'perch', before tripping into the dactylic 'giddily' and quickening 'blossomy' into 'blosmy'. The internal rhyming of 'still' and 'reels' repeats and draws out the long vowel sound with the slightly uneven repetition one might expect from a music attuned to the motion of a swinging twig. And that blossomy twig, swinging in the breeze, keeps to a rhythm that might at any moment alter its motion with the unpredictability of the wind or 'some sudden gale', as if the music might be always imminently on the brink of bursting forth, a musicality that doesn't quite know its own limits. For all the tossing, reeling motion it describes, however, the verse doesn't lose its iambic footing; rather, the metrical harmony sustains rhythm while gesturing towards the uncontained, unrestrained outpouring of the bird's song and the harmonising of abundance into unity. The song awakens all 'earth and sky with *one sensation'* (my emphasis). The poetry seems to express the kind of harmonised unity that Coleridge formulates in 'The Eolian Harp' in which the 'one life' is felt in the all-pervading, animating motion of 'Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where'.[10]

This figuration of verse as a quickening of thinking and feeling into motion is captured in 'The Nightingale'. The bird's song offers a metaphor for poetry akin to the Aeolian harp in giving voice to the rhythms of nature: the bird is able to match its song to the rhythm of the breeze and 'to that motion tune his wanton song / Like Tipsy joy that reels with tossing head'. Here, 'reel' suggests at once 'a commotion, tumult; a noisy uproar', and also the sense of 'staggering, chiefly in drunken reel'.[11] The 'wanton' song hints suggestively at a lack of restraint, passion pursued beyond its proper bounds, but—less salaciously—the word could also mean sportive, frolicsome and (particularly relevant in this context) it could also mean poetic fancifulness. There's a fancifulness involved in likening the bird's song to a personification of Joy, as Kerry McSweeney comments on the peculiar figuration involved in using a personification as the vehicle for a simile (as the immediacy of response gives way to poetic figurativeness).[12] As the poem seeks to recreate a sense of joy in song, the song, in turn, is made part of a figuration of poetry itself. The 'blosmy twig still swinging from the breeze' defines the rhythm of the bird's song and answers to Coleridge's happy characterization of poetry as 'Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying'.[13] Similarly, the chorus of birdsong heard as if a 'gale had swept at once / A hundred airy harps' invokes the familiar Aeolian harp metaphor. The poem reveals itself to be conscious of its status as poetry and its working in a familiar poetic tradition, even as it worries about the potentially stultifying effects of self-consciousness and over-familiarity.

For Coleridge, 'pure joy must come without self-consciousness or philosophical baggage', Adam Potkay suggests.[14] In 'the Nightingale', he seeks to retain a degree of self-consciousness that could both appreciate the bird's

[10] Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', ll. 26,29.
[11] *OED*, s.v. 'reel'.
[12] Kerry McSweeney, *The Language of the Senses: Sensory Perceptual Dynamics in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 92.
[13] Coleridge, 'Youth and Age', l. 1.
[14] Potkay, p. 141.

song for what it is and at the same time take it is as fitting subject for his poem, while also seeking to rid himself of poetical baggage:

> [...] hark! The Nightingale begins its song,
> *'Most musical, most melancholy' Bird!
> A melancholy Bird! Oh! idle thought!
> In nature there is nothing melancholy. (ll. 12-15)

The default response is to quote a line from Milton: 'most musical, most melancholy' invokes the traditional linking of the nightingale's song with melancholy in Milton's poem of pensiveness and sorrow, 'Il Penseroso'. But Coleridge corrects himself: to project melancholy onto nature is a fallacy, the falseness of which is registered in the stagey shock of the thrice-repeated exclamation marks (A melancholy Bird! Oh! idle thought!). Moreover, to allow one's inner feelings to colour one's perceptions of the outer world is an example of the self-obsessiveness of the moping, lovelorn poet, who, 'poor wretch! filled all things with himself, / And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrow' (ll. 19-21).

The internal rhyme and semantic patterning of 'filled all things' and 'tell back the tale' bespeaks the self-referentiality with which nature is made to echo back the poet's own feelings. This is in direct contrast to the maid, whose feelings are openly receptive to nature in her manner of listening to the bird's song. There seems to be a tricksy, strained play on words that would contrast the poet who 'made all gentle sounds tell back the tale' with the 'most gentle maid', who listens in the grove, 'she knows all their notes, / That gentle Maid'. (The former description appears early in the poem and refers to the poet's impulse to hear his own feelings echoed back to him by the sounds of nature, whereas the former refers to the maid's listening, knowing responsiveness to nature.) The verbal patterning of 'made all gentle' and 'most gentle maid', and the echo in the rhymes 'tell'/'tale', 'knows'/'notes' sets up a relationship of contrast. So while he made all gentle sounds tell back *his own* tale; the gentle maid is made gentle through knowing all their notes (that is, she is somehow refined or softened through her conversancy with nature and by allowing its salutary influence to impress itself upon her). An implicit contrast is perhaps also being drawn between the way that the poet has egotistically impressed his own unchecked passions upon nature, has 'filled all things with himself', and the maid's self-effacing manner by which she not only looks beyond herself and into nature, but is 'vowed and dedicate to something more than nature'—through a kind of mutually enhancing aesthetic.

Perhaps this play on 'made all gentle' and 'most gentle maid/made' is far-fetched, but the fact that such over-reading is even tentatively conceivable reveals something about this poem—its inclination to verbal playfulness and alertness to the meaning-making potential of puns and the diptych-like arrangements of words. A similar verbal patterning is used elsewhere in the poem, again, to suggest a mutually enhancing aesthetic. For the ideal poet, Coleridge suggests,

> [...] his song
> Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
> Be lov'd like Nature! (ll. 32-4)

And here the repetition is not gratuitous or idle, as its sounds reiterate the way that this 'conversational poem' is engaged in a calling back to itself, and a harkening back to nature with the same dash and playfulness by which the nightingales 'answer and provoke each other's songs, / With skirmish and capricious passagings'. The repetitions and chiasmic formulations in the verse remind one that there are two ways of hearing, that something which sounds the same can be heard differently according to a determined perspective and interpretation. While finding joy in the bird's song is privileged as an understanding that comes closer to the true nature of things, hearing sorrow in the song, and particularly hearing one's own sorrow resounded back by nature, is at once self-absorbed and supremely egotistical and yet at the same time oddly divorced from the personal through being simply a learned response, a tired literary cliché. But there is arguably a degree of truthfulness to all clichés, and Coleridge seems to be concerned with how recognizing something as a cliché helps tease out the authenticity of one's individual feelings and, in doing so, to re-engage them with a state of naturalness. The poem involves a complex negotiation between individual feeling and lyric expression on the one hand, and self-conscious clinging to poetic and communal affiliations on the other.

At times it as if the poem wearies of the capriciousness or arbitrariness with which other passages of poetry 'answer and provoke each other's songs' in the collective voice of literary tradition. Recalling the doleful poet who hears his own sorrow projected onto the bird's song, Coleridge attests,

> [...] he, and such as he,
> First named these notes a melancholy strain.
> And many a poet echoes the conceit. (ll. 21-3)

But Coleridge is himself echoing the conceit, in both senses of the word, having reiterated Milton's line, and then having audaciously dismissed it. Even in denying it, Coleridge cannot help but invoke the line once more, thus inescapably perpetuating the association, and the word 'melancholy' resounds in the poem, having been repeated three times in as many lines. The repetitions teasingly insist that, once known, these literary associations can't be unheard or separated from the bird's song, and one can't then get back to a 'pure', un-poeticised response to nature. And it's not only lines from Milton that can be heard echoing through the poem, but also Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and John Lyly, among others, (as critics have variously pointed out) and a poem that purports to renounce the literary associations of the nightingale has an ear as much to poetry as it does to the bird's song.[15]

[15] For discussions of the poetic influences at work in the poem, see Frank Doggett, 'Romanticism's Singing Bird', *Studies in English Literature*, *1500-1900*, 14:4 (1974): 547-561 and Fred V. Randel 'Coleridge and the Contentiousness of Romantic Nightingales', *Studies in Romanticism*, 21:1 (1982): 33-55.

The poem in fact reveals itself to be acutely aware of the poetic tradition it is working within, even as it playfully challenges it, in order to call the reader's attention to the conscious attempt to rid itself of freighted literary associations. Critics are quick to point out that Coleridge commits the same pathetic fallacy in attributing mirth to the nightingale's song that he has accused earlier poets of making in their attributions of sorrow. The sense that this is being consciously, even archly, done introduces an undertone of irony in the poem. Potkay notes, 'with a wink to his readers, Coleridge exposes melancholy in nature as fallacious so that he may project joy there', and Emily Sun sees that playfulness as being somehow *over*played: 'what would be the strategic purpose of such irony, such wilful, even hammy use of the pathetic fallacy?', she demands.[16] As these comments suggest, the poem retains an awareness of the double-standard it sets up. But that knowingness seems right here because it counters with wry humour the exasperation of wanting to unlearn a determined response, knowing this to be impossible, and yet feeling the irresistibility of the desire all the same. Only occasionally does this approach a winking, nudging hamminess, however—in the passages of the poem which satirise the figure of the poet as the lovelorn 'wretch', perhaps, or in the derision of those 'youth and maidens most poetical', who, 'in ball-rooms and hot theatres [...] must heave their sighs' in affected displays of sensibility (ll. 35, 37-8). Elsewhere, the poem moves between the serenity of the opening description of listening to the nightingale on a calm, balmy night, the middle section's shades of romance with the gentle maid in her grove, before the poem's bacchanalian delight in the bird's riotous song and the final passage's wistful hope that his son should learn to hear joy in the nightingale's song. It is only from a perspective outside the world of the poem that Coleridge seems to worry about the disunity of its structure and tone, and to give any sense that he felt the irony underpinning his poem risked tipping over into mockery.

When Coleridge sent a copy of 'The Nightingale' to Wordsworth he included with it a passage of doggerel verse that ridiculed his own poetic effort:

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

[16] Emily Sun, 'Poetry, Conversation, Community: *Annus Mirabilis,* 1797-1798', *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Charles Mahoney (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 302-18 (p. 309).

> And makes its own inglorious harmony
> *Æolio crepitû, non carmine*.[17]

This doggerel verse has been regarded by some as a recognition of the poem's failure, its unevenness in tone and structure, and perhaps an attempt to pre-empt criticism.[18] But what seems to originate in self-parody may be a way of assuaging self-pity. The light-heartedness with which Coleridge passes off the subject to his friend perhaps implies that he doesn't want to turn himself into the figure of the 'poor wretch' described in his poem, and it offers a means of deflating the sentimentality which his hopes to assuage sorrow might be taken for. It is difficult to know how much weight to give to paratextual features, but if the epistolary verse would dissuade us from taking 'The Nightingale' too seriously, a footnote that was printed with the poem seems anxious to ensure that the poem is taken seriously enough.

When citing Milton's line, '"Most musical, most melancholy" bird!' only to dispute it, Coleridge included the following footnote:

> This passage in Milton possesses an excellence far superior to that of mere description; it is spoken in the character of the melancholy Man, and has therefore a dramatic propriety. The Author makes this remark, to rescue himself from the charge of having alluded with levity to a line in Milton; a charge than which none could be more painful to him, except perhaps that of having ridiculed his Bible.[19]

It's an odd note. It seems to tap a nerve in Coleridge's sensitivity about undermining a poetic tradition, and his sense that to do so was tantamount to an act of poetic blasphemy. The self-accusation and self-defensiveness regarding any trace of 'levity' suggests that this is, again, about striking the right tone, the right kind of joy.[20] Vacillating between indulgence in levity and self-rebuke might be seen as a characteristic move in Coleridge's work. In 'The Eolian Harp', for example, the sportive, amorousness of the breeze also brings a 'sweet upbraiding', and the poem ends by upbraiding of its own earlier gaiety. Coleridge seems often to relish this dynamic between an impulse to embrace and delight in levity and a corollary impulse for self-admonishment.

The anxiety registered in the footnote to 'The Nightingale' is borne out by those critics who have described Coleridge's poem as 'parodying', 'patronising', even 'ridiculing' Milton. The line cited comes from Milton's address to the nightingale in his poem 'Il Penseroso': 'Sweet Bird that shunn'st the noise of folly, / Most musical, most melancholy!' But when seen within the context of

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[17] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956-71) , I, 244.

[18] See, Robert Koepp '"What [His] Bird's Worth"': Coleridge's "The Nightingale" and His Birds of Different Feathers', Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge, 14 (1999): 53-9

[19] Coleridge, *The Major Works*, p. 702n.

[20] Coleridge was anxious, even, about the tone of the footnote itself, it seems, since he later shied away from the prospect of ridiculing the bible (which, even to deny doing so, risks a kind of nervous tittering at the prospect), and he later omitted the final clause about the bible in the 1834 Poetical Works.

the rest of the poem it is not clear just how serious Milton himself is about all this—as his rhyming of 'folly' and 'melancholy' might suggest.[21] And it is worth remembering that the poem in which the line appears, 'Il Penseroso', is only one half of a pair of poems which also includes 'L'Allegro'—where the one's advocation of pensiveness and melancholy is offset by the other's celebration of mirth and joy. Taken together, these poems offer divergent mantras for the Apollonian versus Dionysian approach to life, and invoke further oppositions between light and dark, day and night, sacred and profane love. Again, Coleridge's poem looks to a diptych-like arrangement of balance and contrast: his poem, as well as including the direct reference to 'Il Penseroso', contains many implicit allusions to its companion piece, 'L'Allegro'. For example, in the latter poem 'loathed Melancholy' is shunned in favour of 'Jest and youthful Jollity, / Quips and cranks and wanton wiles' (ll. 26-7). In a catalogue of pastoral idylls Milton describes how 'every shepherd tells his tale' (l. 67), which is developed by Coleridge into the figure of the poet who would have the bird's song 'tell back the tale / Of his own sorrow'—although here Coleridge's replaces the shepherd's solace in nature with the poet's more troubled unburdening. In addition, Coleridge's 'giddy' nightingale and 'wanton song' echoes Milton's description of verse as

> [...] notes, with many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
> With wanton heed and giddy cunning. (ll. 139-41)

As 'wanton heed' brings together spontaneous passion with temperance and circumspection, so 'giddy cunning' combines lightheadedness with dark intent and scheming. The joys in 'L'Allegro', then, are not without their unsettling undertones. Similarly, Alun Jones notes a 'strange echo' of *Comus* at the point where Comus first enters the scene of the woodland grove intent on mischief and dark enchantments and bidding 'welcome joy, and feast, / Midnight shout, and revelry, / Tipsy dance, and jollity' before his attempted seduction of the Lady.[22] The echoes of Milton in Coleridge's poem show him not simply 'alluding with levity', but introducing a complex and disturbing context for the tipsy, giddy joy that the gentle maid hears in the nightingale's song as she listens in her dark grove. Subsequently, one might see in the revisionary attempt to restore the nightingale's song to nature and joy an implicit utopian impulse to restore nature to an uncorrupted state.

It is this mode of thinking that Coleridge claims to share with William and Dorothy:

> My friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt
> A different lore: we may not thus profane
> Nature's sweet voices, always full of love

[21] John Milton, 'Il Penseroso', *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), ll. 61-2.
[22] Milton, *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634 [Comus]*, ll. 102-4.

> And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
> That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
> With fast thick warble his delicious notes. (ll. 40-45)

'"Tis the merry nightingale', Coleridge seeks to convince himself, through an alternative response that seeks to find its way back to the sheer pleasure in the sound of the nightingale's song—with its

> […] murmurs musical and swift jug jug,
> And one low piping Sound more sweet than all—
> Stirring the air with such a harmony,
> That should you close your eyes, you might almost
> Forget it was not day! (ll. 60-64)

'Almost'. The word snags there at the end of the line as if remains too conscious of its the attempt to forget, just as the poem's conspicuously going out of its way to avoid using the word 'night' and rather say 'not day'—only points up what is being consciously unacknowledged. While celebrating the exuberance of the bird's song—its 'murmurs musical and swift jug jug'—the poem registers that the palliating effect of its harmony is only ever *almost* fulfilled, and implicitly admits of a sadness that would feel the need to forget that it was night. This is not, then, merely obliviousness or quietism, but a conscious effort to forget, a willing suspension of sorrow, and an effort to momentarily raise one's spirits in line with the uplifting effect of nature's harmony.

Just as the maid 'knows all their notes' and Coleridge and his companions 'have learnt a different lore', in the final section of the poem Coleridge holds out the hope that his son will arrive at a state of awareness that might never need to forget it was not day:

> […] But if that Heaven
> Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up
> Familiar with these songs, that with the night
> He may associate joy.

In Hartley is seen the potential for a new response to nature made possible through poetry, through being made 'familiar with these songs'. Again, it is not that an untrained, 'pure', or unselfconscious response is being privileged over a learned, aesthetic one, but that a refining and retraining of one's relations with nature is arrived at through a familiarity with the bird's song which is also, implicitly, a familiarity with poetry. 'The Nightingale' holds poetry as both symptom and cure when it comes to extremes of emotion, whereby sorrow is the symptom of poetic conditioning palliated by the joy inherent in nature—as it is mediated by and expressed through poetry.