'What aspect wears the soul within?': Sara Coleridge and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Connections, and the Image of Childhood

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IT IS HARTLEY COLERIDGE who is primarily recalled as the 'poet-child' of the 'poet-father',[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge's daughter, Sara, on the other hand, is more often recognised as the intellectually gifted editor of her father's works—but Sara Coleridge was a 'poet-child' too. She published an edition of children's verse (*Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children*, 1834) a fairytale romance (*Phantasmion,* 1837), and just recently a wealth of previously unpublished works has become available in the new edition of *Collected Poems* edited by Peter Swaab (2007). The phrases 'poet-child' and 'poet-father' are reminiscent of Harold Bloom's phrase 'parent-poem' in his seminal study *The Anxiety of Influence*.[2] I employ the term 'poet-child' here to embody both the familial connection and also the notions of literary inheritance, influence and heritage suggested in criticism such as Bloom's. The 'poet-child' is not a child, but Sara and Hartley writing as adults, ever in the shadow of their father.

In this paper I suggest that connections between the poems of S. T. Coleridge and Sara Coleridge are significant, as they illustrate what Sara as a 'poet-child' achieves. Sara spans generations by speaking to her own children in verse (thus recalling her father's poems that do the same, *indirectly*), and by clearly responding to Coleridge's poems that lament the loss of youth (thus summoning his voice and presence *directly*). Through her poetry, Sara recalls and reworks her father's rhetorical musings on childhood in contemplation of her own children, as the next generation, and as a woman - an innovation reminiscent of Bloom's 'revisionism'.[3] However, instead of attempting to 'liberate' herself from her father (as in the Freudian 'family romance' at the core of Bloom's study),[4] Sara seeks a *connection* with Coleridge through his poetry, finding him there 'in those blurred pages, as she had not found him in the flesh' (Virginia Woolf).[5] My critical argument is that it is through Sara's original poetical compositions, too, that she seeks, and finds, this connection. I will discuss here this form of indirect Coleridgean unity, this convergence of ideas about childhood in the two poets' works addressed to their children. I will also return to Sara's poems that are a more direct response, or address, to Coleridge. Overall, Sara recalls her father but as an original poet; her musings on generation are innovative and represent her strength as a poet in her own right. She looks forward to the next generation by addressing her children, but the presence of the previous generation (her father) delivers an unremitting

[1] Derwent Coleridge, 'Memoir of Hartley Coleridge' in Hartley Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. by Derwent Coleridge, Vol I (London: Edward Moxon, 1851) p. xxvi.

[2] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 15.

[3] Bloom, p. 30.

[4] Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality,* trans. James Strachey and Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1977 repr. 1991) p. 221. See also: Bloom, p. 8.

[5] Virginia Woolf, 'Sara Coleridge' in *The Death of the Moth and other essays* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1942) p. 115.

lyrical influence. Her originality and power as a poet is this vision of generational emotion (the poetical father *and* the potential of offspring).

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Coleridge and Sara portray childhood as innocence, the antithesis to adulthood's experience. That is, the qualities that childhood embodies for both poets are employed as a comparison with their personal (as their position as the speaker in the poems) state of mind in adulthood. This is broadly a reflection of the Romantic principle of childhood: a version of the Wordsworthian child in poetry as a 'figure signifying the compensatory simplicity of what the adult is not'.[6] For the Coleridges, it is rather that in seeing a quality in the child that is lost in adulthood, the poet creates new emotions and a sense of revelation. The child is dominant, as in Wordsworth's oft-quoted phrase 'The Child is Father of the Man'.[7] The child is an embodiment of potential, an emblem of freedom, harbouring those qualities that the adult mind may long for, but in their 'experience', their maturity, their world-weariness, they can no longer have. Sara, as the next generation, offers an original poetical perspective on the adult/child relationship, building on a canon of literature founded by her father.

This can be illustrated by looking at two poems, Sara Coleridge's 'Poppies' and S. T. Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'.[8] In both of these poems, childhood is a figure the poet addresses, in the form of the speaker's own son. In 'Poppies' the addressee is Sara's son Herbert: 'O then my sweet, my happy boy' (21). In 'Frost at Midnight', it is Coleridge's son Hartley: 'Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side' (44). The speaker is crucially a parent both musing about and addressing a child, as if adulthood is exemplified by being a loving parent ('*My* cradled infant' (7), '*My* Herbert' (2)). Childhood, in turn, is represented by that singular offspring of the speaker in the poem. It is this contrast - the adult voice and the child presence in the poem - that distinguishes adulthood from childhood.

Childhood is, in 'Poppies' and 'Frost at Midnight', what I will term a 'youthful innocence'. The child is young (Hartley is a 'babe' (44), Herbert is a 'boy' (21)), and their innocence is manifest in the Lockean sense that they are a 'blank slate', a *tabula rasa*:[9]

> My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
> With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
> And think that thou shalt learn far other lore

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[6] Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p. 45.

[7] William Wordsworth, 'My heart leaps up when I behold' in *The Major Works* ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 246.

[8] All poems by S. T. Coleridge taken from the edition *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Complete Poems* ed. by William Keach (London: Penguin, 1997 repr. 2004). All poems by Sara Coleridge taken from the edition *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems* ed. by Peter Swaab (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2007).

[9] See, for example, Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995) pp. 62-4.

> And in far other scenes!
> […]
> Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
> Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.[10]

This potential, this embodiment of opportunity and possibility as yet endued with hope, is a stark contrast to the speaker's recollection of their own childhood: 'For I was reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim, / And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars' (53-4). Similarly, Sara as the speaker in 'Poppies' says of Herbert, 'but little does my darling know' (7), implying his youthful ignorance, his 'blank' state at present, unaware of the true nature of the relief the poppies (i.e. opium) bring to 'dear Mama':

> When poor Mama long restless lies,
> She drinks the poppy's juice;
> That liquor soon can close her eyes,
> And slumber soft produce:
> O then my sweet, my happy boy
> Will thank the Poppy-flower,
> Which brings the sleep to dear Mama,
> At midnight's darksome hour.[11]

Herbert 'Will thank the Poppy-flower', but the speaker makes it explicit that he is unaware of the dark realities of how they really comfort 'Mama': 'But they to him are nothing more / Than other brilliant weeds' (11-12). Sara considers Herbert's being insensible to her opium addiction:

> O! how shouldst thou, with beaming brow,
> With eye and cheek so bright,
> Know aught of that gay blossom's power,
> Or sorrows of the night? (13-16)

But she, by contrast, cannot escape 'midnight's darksome hour' and the 'sorrows of the night'—these phrases characterise her as speaker. The poppies have a dual meaning for the adult which they cannot have for the child. In 'Frost at Midnight', too, Coleridge expounds the speaker's state of understanding as he recognises his seclusion from nature in his own childhood. This is further exemplified by little Hartley's blissful ignorance of such a feeling as regret or longing. He has potential for eternal happiness in nature: 'Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee' (65).

The poet addresses childhood in a variety of ways in both 'Poppies' and 'Frost at Midnight'. Sara's poem is directed to her children as something to be read by them and understood, reflecting a canon of eighteenth-century female authors: 'certainly, many eighteenth-century women writers included poetry

[10] 'Frost at Midnight', 48-51, 63-4
[11] 'Poppies', 17-24

directed at their children in their published collections'.[12] 'Poppies' was first published in Sara's 1834 volume, *Pretty Lessons*. The metrically fluent, stable verse and simple rhyme scheme of 'Poppies' result in a 'childlike' verse form, reminiscent of a nursery-rhyme. In contrast, Coleridge's poem is not 'children's literature' (not published initially and purposely *for* children). 'Frost at Midnight' is a collection of musings not actually speaking to Hartley in the sense that he will understand them; Hartley is an infant, he cannot understand, he cannot respond. Coleridge's innovative, conversational blank verse is a complex and subtle poetical form: like Wordsworth, Coleridge does not write '*for* children but *about* children for the benefit of adult'.[13]

However, although 'Poppies' is a poem for Herbert in a collection of children's poetry, ironically Herbert *cannot* understand the dual significance of the poppies as his mother does, and therefore the full meaning of the poem is unavailable to its addressee. So for both Coleridges, childhood is 'addressed' in a rhetorical musing—at once genuinely speaking to the child and yet also crucially in a way in which they cannot at present comprehend. Sara's verses may have a similar structure to a nursery-rhyme, but their message is insidious, the simple form ironically distracting from the true darkness of the poem.

Sara and Coleridge's perceptions of childhood merge in that both poets use it as a prompt for contemplation of their own condition. Sara's method of tackling these self-perceptions in her poetry is particularly interesting.

In S. T. Coleridge's 'Christabel', Hartley 'fills a *father's* eyes with light', as he 'always finds, and never seeks' (659-661). In 'The Nightingale', Coleridge's own experiences with nature in adulthood lead him again to project a hymn of optimism onto the child Hartley: 'I deem it wise / To make him Nature's play-mate' (96-7). In Sara's poems, adulthood is comparable with the youthful vigour and ignorance of childhood (embodied, again, in Herbert):

> My head's confused, my thoughts are dull,
> But simple rhymes I still may find:
> I'm all unfit for serious themes,
> Yet I may please thy childish mind.[14]

She suggests that Herbert should enjoy this fleeting freedom so exclusive to childhood: 'Then Herbert, my child, to the meadows repair, / Make hay while it shines, and enjoy the fresh air, / Til age sets his seal on your brow' ('The Blessing of Health', 28-30). Also, as Hartley 'fills a father's eyes with light', Sara says to Herbert 'Thy careless mirth, bring happiness to me' ('Benoni. Dedication', 6); the child is a source of joy. The majority of poems Sara wrote in mid-life were addressed to her children (defined by Swaab as the period 1829-1843, 'the period of her marriage and of the prolific outpouring of her verses for her children').[15] Recurring is this notion of her own 'sad experience'

[12] M. O. Grenby, *Children's Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) p. 38-9.
[13] Plotz, p. 46.
[14] To Herbert Coleridge. Feb 13 1834, 9-12
[15] Swaab, 'Introduction' in *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems* p. 6.

('Why those tears my little treasure', 21).

'Sad experience', then, leads us to the crucial difference in tone between 'Frost at Midnight' and 'Poppies'. Do the positive musings on childhood as blissful innocence converge with that state of realisation for the speaker? Sara's achievement as an individual poet here is the blend of emotions - her loving sentiments as a mother juxtaposed with her anxiety as an individual. Sara's 'Poppies' is unsettling, reflecting her dependence on opium to conquer 'the sorrows of the night', despite her love for Herbert and his innocent happiness. Herbert evokes her maternal fondness, but the poem concludes with the phrase 'midnight's darksome hour', a prevailing definition of her adult state. In contrast 'Frost at Midnight' produces a harmony of emotions, embodied in the calm temperance of nature at the end of the poem, as the frost is 'Quietly shining to the quiet Moon' (74). These final lines 'are an exceptionally fine realisation of the unity, the subtle reciprocity, that has emerged in Coleridge's experience'.[16] Optimism for Hartley's potential future overwhelms Coleridge.
In order to examine the extent of Sara Coleridge's originality, we must grasp the nettle that is her poetry and in so doing, consider the intuition and layered perception of her verse. To recognise her sensitivity, one has to delve slightly deeper into Sara's perception of her child's happiness (or potential happiness) as distant from her own state of being. Sara's poems addressed to her children can be dismissed as unremarkable, simple, 'pretty' verses, exhibiting parental warmth and affection and the child's glee - but little else. However I argue this is not the case. Like her father, we know Sara's experiences of parenthood were at times extremely painful. As Swaab writes, 'Sara suffered from severe post-natal depression after Edith was born, and then again after the death of her twins shortly after their birth in January 1834'.[17] Her poetic achievement is in her ability to capture that motherly love but nonetheless retain an anxiety about her own state. Her poems appear calm on the surface, but as we have already seen, the insidious tone in works such as 'Poppies' leads us to reflect on the speaker's troubles. This feature is fundamental to Sara's originality and voice.

In 'Edith Asleep', for example, we initially recognise a poem about love. We hear the parent's voice watching a child sleep happily—the tone immediately asserts itself as all maternal warmth and affection.

> Fast, fast asleep my Edith lies,
> With her snowy night-dress on;
> Closed now are her sparkling eyes;
> All her merry thoughts are gone.
> Gone! ah no! perhaps she dreams;
> Perhaps she views the crystal streams,
> Wanders in the grove and field, -
> What hath sleep to her revealed?[18]

[16] Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979) p. 269.
[17] Peter Swaab, 'Sara Coleridge: Poems and their Addressees', in *The Coleridge Bulletin*, New Series 33, Summer 2009
[18] 'Edith Asleep', 1-8

However, worry and insecurity are juxtaposed with this parental love. 'All her merry thoughts are gone. / Gone! Ah no!' (4-5) - this line implies that the speaker must reassure herself (and the reader) by dismissing the possibility of death that 'gone' implies. The poem is always returning to the speaker's perceptions of the child, as in 'Poppies'. 'Perhaps' is constantly repeated throughout 'Edith Asleep', reminding us that this is the mother's perceptive imagining of the child's dream, not the child's dream itself. It is the adult state that the poem comments on; it is the adult's imagination ('What hath sleep to her revealed?', 8).

As in 'Frost at Midnight', in 'Edith Asleep' the baby slumbers beside the poet, but Sara's poem lacks the calm of 'the return', a crucial feature of Coleridge's conversation poem described by G. M. Harper. In 'Frost at Midnight', Coleridge moves from his initial solitary musings via a 'superb flight of imagination'[19] recalling his own childhood, which then brings him back to a contemplation of Hartley's future: 'But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores' (54-5). At the end of the poem, as Hartley slumbers on, his father watches the frost in tranquillity. However in 'Edith Asleep', the baby awakes at the end of the poem, prompting the speaker's tender yet hurried exultation 'O, she's waking! hush! hush! hush!' (40).

'Edith Asleep' depicts a mother seeking consolation in her child's distance from reality—there is no happiness drawn from that child's projected future, as in 'Frost at Midnight'. Like Herbert in 'Poppies', Edith is removed from reality either in dreams or in ignorance. In the second stanza, Sara carefully places herself as mother in a calm night ('All the stars are sweetly tinkling' 10), whereas her imagination transports the sleeping Edith to daytime; the 'sun doth shine' (13).

The emergence of this hinted pain and contemplative suffering is what makes Sara's poems so important and merits the study of her verse as something more than just a mother's poem to her offspring. In speaking to her children perhaps Sara seeks consolation about her life and, unlike in her father's musings, in her poetical revelation her children *cannot* deliver a completely tangible image of hope.

Overall, it is the Coleridgean unity of an internal musing on inspiration (here the child), that the poems' dominant focus is actually revealing about the *speaker's* mind, the adult mind, in a tone akin to enlightenment in this sense. The child, and therefore childhood, is the external source of inspiration, but the internal musings within, of the *adult* mind, hold the crucial message of the poems.

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The similarities between S. T. Coleridge and Sara Coleridge's presentation and use of childhood are particularly significant because the two poets in question are parent and child. It is also important to recall here the influence of the

[19] G. M. Harper, cited in Paul Magnuson, 'The Conversation Poems' in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* ed. by Lucy Newlyn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 32.

other intellectual minds of Sara's upbringing. Wordsworth and 'Uncle' Southey, present in her childhood in the Lakes, were present in her adult thought too, as she notes: 'What should I have been without them! To my Uncle Southey I owe much […] to Mr. Wordsworth and my father I owe my *thoughts* more than to all other men put together'.[20] But even in this statement Sara's father is recalled: it is arguably Coleridge's presence that dominantly reverberates through her creativity, and a debt, a sense of 'owing' persists despite his absence during her youth. Sara did not see Coleridge for long periods of time (the longest being over ten years);[21] their relationship was not 'close' in this sense. She writes of their 'life-long separation', 'I never lived with him for more than a few weeks at a time'.[22] Sara had three intellectual 'fathers', but it was Coleridge who she continually sought a connection with through writing, almost in an attempt to reconcile this absence, in view of a different kind of literary relationship and closeness, as I shall explore below.

In Sara's poems addressed to her children, because of her parentage, we immediately recall her father's poems addressed to his children (especially those iconic poems addressed to his first-born, Hartley). Sara is the next generation inscribing the same concerns in poetry; Sara's awareness of her father's overwhelming figure was something undoubtedly present in her mind as she composed herself to write:

> I feel the most complete sympathy with my father in his account of his literary difficulties. Whatever subject I commence, I feel discontented unless I could pursue it in every direction to the farthest bounds of thought, and then, when some scheme is to be executed, my energies are paralysed with the very notion of the indefinite vastness which I long to fill. This was the reason my father wrote by snatches. He could not bear to complete incompletely, which everyone else does.[23]

This text is part of the evidence brought forward by critics to establish the idea that Sara is, of all Coleridge's children, the most like their father.[24] Sara is most commonly recognised in critical and biographical studies as Coleridge's editor—indeed her work provided a basis for the texts we read today ('Never did any daughter contribute so handsomely to a poet's fame').[25] As his editor,

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[20] Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters* ed. by Edith Coleridge (London: Henry S. King, 1875) p. 241.

[21] Between 1812-1823. See Earl Leslie Griggs, *Coleridge Fille* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940) pp. 37-8.

[22] Sara Coleridge, 'The Autobiography of Sara Coleridge' in Bradford K. Mudge, *Sara Coleridge, a Victorian Daughter: Her Life and Essays* (London: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 249.

[23] Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge* cited in Mudge, *Sara Coleridge, a Victorian Daughter* p. 99.

[24] E.g. '[Sara was] arguably the most Coleridgean of Coleridge's offspring'. Bradford K. Mudge, 'Coleridge, Sara (1802–1852)' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, Online edn. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5889> [accessed: 9 March 2012]. Also: 'In many ways Sara was more like her father, and understood him far better, than either of his sons.' Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998) p. 536.

[25] E. J. Morley , Review of *Coleridge Fille* by Earl Leslie Griggs in *The Review of English Studies* , Vol. 17, No. 66 (Apr., 1941), Oxford University Press. Online edn. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/509367> [accessed: 9 March 2012] p. 241.

submerged in his papers, it seems Sara's relationship with her father is characterised by writing, literature and poetry. Why then has little attempt been made to address the mutual concerns of their poetical works? Sara has been described as 'heir' to her father's work, the 'consolidator of the fragmentary Coleridge'.[26] If she is 'heir' in her role as editor, is she not also heir in her poetic works? Why also has so little attention been paid to Sara as an innovative poet in her own right? Bloom's study of influence emphasises a 'misreading', a 'revisionism' of existing poetry in order to synthesise the new.[27] We can apply this theory to Sara, as she modifies her address to children as both a woman and a member of the next generation. Also, we can see that 'Frost at Midnight' harbours an optimism which 'Poppies' and 'Edith Asleep' lack. Coleridge's optimism at the time of composing 'Frost at Midnight' was not realised, as his marriage broke down and his own opium addiction began to take hold.[28] Sara then revises or 'misreads' Coleridge's poem to deliver her poem that does not procure an unrealistic optimism. 'Poppies' and 'Edith Asleep' are settled in the present, and do not look to the future.

This speculation is one example of how we might align Bloom's theory of influence when considering Coleridge's influence on Sara, but it soon encounters problems. These problems are useful, however, in that they shed light on why Sara has been neglected as a poet in general. Bloom's theory is male-centred. It is the view that 'the history of poetry is the history of a sequence of Oedipal struggles, *sons against fathers'*.[29] Bloom also states that his 'concern is only with strong poets, major figures'.[30] Sara has suffered repeatedly by being labelled as a 'minor figure' in poetry.[31] Why is this so? Some feminist arguments (Virginia Woolf, Bradford K. Mudge) have implied that Sara sacrificed her own intellectual talents in order to dedicate herself to editing her father's works.[32] Early studies of Sara's works saw them important only if somehow insightful in relation to her father's.[33] There is also a stigma attached to children's literature that meant Sara's verse published during her lifetime, as verse for children, has been overlooked. Sara may not have been the prolific, deeply philosophical, metaphysical writer that her father was, but her meditative verses deliver their own innovations; Sara's work as a comment on poetical and familial generations alone is insightful and provocative. Sara's poetry is interdependent on her position as a mother, a children's author, and

[26] Alison Hickey, "The Body of My Father's Writings': Sara Coleridge's Genial Labour' in *Literary Couplings* ed. by Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) p. 125.
[27] Bloom, p. 30.
[28] See, for example, Kelvin Everest, 'Coleridge's life' in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* pp. 17-31.
[29] 'Bloom, Harold' in Jenny Stringer, *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Literature in English,* Oxford University Press, Online edn. Oxford Reference Online <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t192.e288> [accessed: 9 March 2012].
[30] Bloom, p. 5.
[31] E.g. 'Sara Coleridge was distinctly a minor figure' Griggs, p. vii.
[32] See Woolf, pp. 116-118, and Mudge, *Sara Coleridge, a Victorian Daughter* p. 117 – 'his reputation was revived at the expense of her own'.
[33] [Referring to Griggs' 1940 biography] 'Sara's life amounts to little more than an interesting addendum to the life of her illustrious father.' Mudge, *Sara Coleridge, a Victorian Daughter* p. 180.

of course her father (the heavy weight of her father's name being one that is unrelenting and unalleviated, for author and reader alike).

But maybe also we can see the relationship between Coleridge and Sara as an inversion of Bloom's study and its Freudian roots. Freud's 'family romance' asserts the necessity of the 'liberation of an individual […] from the authority of his parents'.[34] As I asserted at the beginning of this paper, Sara's writings in adulthood suggest that she was not looking for liberation, but connection. Alison Hickey argues that Sara, in her editing, 'strives to make herself a whole child by making her author a whole author'.[35] Woolf likewise suggests that reading her father's works was 'self-realisation' for Sara.[36] Richard Holmes proposes that in the process of her editorial work Sara felt she was 'rediscovering [Coleridge] in her own heart'.[37] Can the same be said about her poetry? If Sara is a 'continuation' of her father (Woolf),[38] if we can recognise similar themes in their poetical compositions, if Sara was so submerged in her father's writings as she attempted to organise an array of papers after his death, then is this not so? Sara 'spent little time in the company of her father'[39]- but only in a physical sense. In a literary sense, the opposite is true.

In being the 'poet-child' of a 'poet-father', Sara is then in some ways ever a child in that her state is defined constantly as the daughter of the great man. But the Coleridge-child that is addressed in 'Frost at Midnight', or other Coleridge poems, is *not* Sara, but her elder brother, Hartley. Derwent Coleridge said of Hartley that in his father's presence he 'felt as a child'.[40] Hartley uses poetry to respond to those poems like 'Frost at Midnight' in which he appears.[41] But in a distinctly different way, Sara's absence in her father's poetry leads her to direct a poetical response, not to the poems of paternal affection (as Hartley does in his anguished sonnets), but to her father's melancholy poetry on the anxiety of legacy, and the revelations of old age:

> Father, no amaranths e'er shall wreathe my brow, -
> Enough that round thy grave they flourish now:[42]

Those two crucial poems by Sara that are responses to her father's work– 'For my Father on his lines called 'Work Without Hope", 'On reading my Father's 'Youth and Age", are revealing in that Sara, so absent from her father's poetry, cannot directly address a reply to the poems about *childhood*, because these are addressed to Hartley (although the lasting influence of her father's voice in Sara's poems for *her* children is, as we have seen, evident). By inserting 'my

[34] Freud, p. 221.
[35] Hickey, p. 129.
[36] Woolf, p. 115.
[37] Holmes, p. 536.
[38] Woolf, p. 111.
[39] Mudge, 'Coleridge, Sara (1802–1852)' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
[40] Derwent Coleridge, p. xxiii.
[41] See, for example, Hartley Coleridge, 'Dedicatory Sonnet' to S. T. Coleridge in *Poems* (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1833) p. iv.
[42] 'For my Father on his lines called 'Work Without Hope", 1-2

Father' into the title, Sara forces the reader of these poems to have Coleridge present in their mind, a contrast to the implied presence of Coleridge in other works such as 'Poppies'. Sara therefore 'directly' addresses and responds to Coleridge's poems on the ephemeral nature of life, as she dedicates herself to assuring his legacy; his agonising prompts her to reassure him in poetry, in an inversion of the parent-child relationship. In her reassurance, however, her treatment of the meditations of the original poems is altered.

Both sets of poems (Coleridge's originals and Sara's responses) muse on anxiety in the state of old-age, and are further evidence for the two poets' consideration of adulthood as a distinct state from childhood in its limited freedom. Sara recognises her own anxieties in her father's verse and applies them to herself. Overall, her response is direct in that she addresses the poem to her father, but whereas it is her father who prompts her response, the nature of that response is Sara's own. The 'Youth and Age' poems both attempt to reconcile age with youthful potential via the mind: 'Life is but thought: so think I will / That Youth and I are house-mates still' (S. T. Coleridge, 37-8), 'I ask, what aspect wears the soul within?' (Sara Coleridge, 13). In S. T. Coleridge's 'Work Without Hope', 'hope without an object cannot live' (14). In her response, Sara, recognising her 'humble tasks' (21) of editing as enriching the 'amaranths' that 'flourish' round Coleridge's grave (1-2), metaphoric of his enduring legacy, reaches the contemplation that 'Ne'er was it mine t'unlock rich founts of song, / As thine it was' (7-8). But Sara reconstructs Coleridge's image of the ageing poet, the 'sole unbusy thing' (5) by infusing hope within her own verse:

> Yet Hope still lives, and oft, to objects fair
> In prospect pointing, bids me still pursue
> My humble tasks: - I list - but backward turn
> Objects for ever lost struggling to discern. (19-22)

Sara recognised emotion in her father's later poetry that she could reflect on and respond to—again implying a mutual concern with age and lost potential, the mysteries of the past ('struggling to discern'), and an anxiety in adulthood that is difficult to overcome.

These poems represent in the work of both Coleridges an attempt to assign feelings of a melancholy past to a more optimistic present. This is also, as we have seen, the purpose by which both poets address their sons in 'Frost at Midnight' and 'Poppies'. 'Frost at Midnight' is infused with optimism; 'Poppies' is more sombre but Herbert is an emblem of happy ignorance. 'Childhood' becomes a source of joy in tangent to the experienced state of the adult mind. Significantly, recollections of their own childhood are occasionally mournful for both writers, again inducing a sense of 'melancholy past' or regret: S. T. Coleridge in 'The Pains of Sleep' employs childhood as a simile for his state of despair in his 'sufferings strange and wild'; 'I wept as I had been a child' (39-40). The 'Letter to -----., April 4, 1802.' (what was to become the

'Dejection' ode) recalls again that fearful image of Christ's Hospital: 'Alas! For cloister'd in a city School, / The Sky was all, I knew, of Beautiful' (63-4). Sara's unfinished autobiography details how some of her childhood memories are 'tinged with pain'; 'How much more vividly we remember the painful than the pleasurable'.[43] Both suggest that it is only through the next generation that true potential and an 'ideal' childhood might be accessed; the speaker cannot recall their own childhood without adulthood's overwrought influence corrupting a memory or recalling sadness more vividly than pleasure.

Sara accepts her position as a 'poet-child', ever in Coleridge's shadow. She produces a body of work that repeatedly reflects and recalls her dynamic poet-father, both directly and indirectly. This does not automatically make her a 'minor' figure, however—Sara is an original voice, much as she is influenced by her father. In comparison to Hartley, Sara represents a progression of ideas that resound on childhood in another generation. Hartley was not a father, and could only reflect upon his own childhood in memories, and the childhood of his nieces and nephews. Sara, as a mother, related to Coleridge's address of childhood more effectively and progressively in relation to her own children and the next generation. Sara creates her own questions about childhood and attempts to answer some of her father's musings on age. She makes explicit that it is partly *because* her father does not speak to her personally, and is such a complicated parent-figure, that overall there is such a close literary and intellectual bond, constantly reverberating in Sara's writings:

> Indeed, [S. T. Coleridge] seems ever at my ear […] speaking not personally to me, and yet in a way so natural to my feeling, that *finds* me so fully, and awakens such a strong echo in my mind and heart, that I seem more intimate with him now than I ever was in life.[44]

[43] Sara Coleridge, 'The Autobiography of Sara Coleridge' p. 261.
[44] Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters* p. 342.