

<sup>18</sup>*Table Talk* (1833).

<sup>19</sup>*Letters*, VI: 731.

<sup>20</sup>*Lectures 1808-1819*, I: 70.

<sup>21</sup>*Lectures*, II: 494.

<sup>22</sup>*Letters*, II: 1033.

<sup>23</sup>*Biographia*, II: 122.

<sup>24</sup>*Biographia*, II: 128.

<sup>25</sup>CN 4115.

<sup>26</sup>Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la Différence*, (Paris, 1967), p. ii.

<sup>27</sup>Derrida, 23.

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## Coleridge on Emotion: Experience into Theory

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Among the writings of Coleridge's earlier period are frequent statements that foreground emotion as a significant principle of the mind. In 1796, for example, he said in a letter "My philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from, my feelings: & this, I think, peculiarizes my style of writing" (*CL* I: 279);<sup>1</sup> in 1800 he was proposing an investigation of "the Laws by which our Feelings form affinities with each other, with Ideas, & with words" (*CL* I: 656). In 1803 he was offering this view of his metaphysics, in contrast to those whose metaphysics was merely an abuse of language: its purpose was "to support all old & venerable Truths, to support, to kindle, to project, to make the Reason spread Light over our Feelings, to make our Feelings diffuse vital Warmth thro' our Reason" (*CN* I: 1623).<sup>2</sup> No doubt it was such claims that led Humphry Davy, in a letter of 1804, to praise Coleridge's powers, and tell him that "you are to be the historian of the Philosophy of feeling" (*CL* II: 1103).

A significant element of this early approach, which appears to make feeling an integral component of both his philosophy and his poetics, survives in Coleridge's later writing. But some of the key statements on the imagination, for example, omit reference to the role of feeling, and in other statements its role seems to be downplayed. This was noticed by Humphry House, who remarked that in reformulating his ideas for publication, Coleridge "pared away some of his own thoughts," especially those relating to emotion, so that the poetic theory became more obscure than it might have been.<sup>3</sup> House also complained that in subsequent discussions of Coleridge's theory, "the emotional element has been given inadequate weight" (p. 148). One of the purposes of House's discussion was to trace the origins of Coleridge's ideas on feeling back to his experience, in particular to Coleridge's awareness of the body and its influence on memory. House was the first to show that more than any other poet-critic in literary history, from Sidney to T. S. Eliot, Coleridge's poetic theory was grounded in the phenomena of his own experience. But it

is also true, as House's account suggested, that much of that experience was filtered out of the mature statement of his poetics in the *Biographia Literaria*.

Two specific passages can be cited to show this loss. In Chapter 14 of the *Biographia*, Coleridge offers a definition of poetry which is based on the formal properties of verse: on metre and on the relation of part to whole. In the first draft of the passage in a notebook of 1809, however, it is feeling that forms the basic premise:

Poetry is the species of composition, which represents external nature, or the human mind, — both in relation to human affections — so as to produce immediate pleasure — / and the greatest quantity of immediate pleasure in each part, that is compatible with the largest possible <sum> of Pleasure in the whole — (*CN* III. 3615)

In the rewritten definition of the *Biographia* it is the "human affections" that are dropped. In another passage, during his account of Shakespeare's early powers in Chapter 15, Coleridge's revisions compress the original material and make the imaginative process being described less clear. Coleridge's argument is that copies of images from nature do not "characterize the poet." In the notebook entry (written in 1811) Coleridge continues:

In order to do this, they must either be blended with or merged in, other images — by the Passion, by the specific modification of pleasurable Feelings which the contemplation of the Image had awakened in the Poet himself (*CN* III: 4115)

In Chapter 15, this is compressed to:

They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion . . .

This omits both the "blending and merging" and the notion that the feelings of the poet themselves undergo "specific modification."

Both passages thus move away from the experiential: the first by omitting "human affections" from the definition of poetry; the second by making the emotional process less explicit. It would be wrong, I think, to believe that such revisions show that Coleridge had changed his mind about the role of feeling. His major statements on the imagination, including that in which it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate," are understandable only within the context of an agency that embodies the processes involved. To judge by his earlier more explicit accounts of the matter, that agency can only be feeling.

By examining Coleridge's earlier accounts of feeling, then, we should gain a better understanding of imagination, in particular its modifying, blending, and unifying powers, which otherwise remain somewhat mysterious. This would be worth doing, not only for the light it can cast on Coleridge's enterprise, but because the knowledge that Coleridge has to offer about this aspect of feeling has largely been overlooked in our own time, both in literary studies and in psychology.

At the same time, however, there is a second component of Coleridge's earlier writings about feeling, which is also important. This is his grasp of the circumstances in which feeling is not productive: times at which the self is paralyzed or appears threatened with destruction from within by feeling. This pathological aspect of emotion is not, of course, carried into Coleridge's published accounts of the imagination, where only the modifying and unifying role of feeling is acknowledged. But it can be argued that this omission leaves the standard account of imagination incomplete. After all, Coleridge's own poetry, notably "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," provide in narrative form symbolic equivalents of these inner states,<sup>4</sup> and other important poems provide direct accounts of such feelings, as in "Dejection: An Ode" and "Pains of Sleep." Incidentally, this aspect, what I am calling the pathology of emotions, is also seriously under-investigated in modern psychology, being left mainly to those working in clinical psychology. One of the major insights that Coleridge's writings offer, is to illuminate the relation between normal and pathological emotions, and to suggest the significant contribution that both make to an understanding of the imagination.

The development in Coleridge's understanding of feeling seems partly due to his love for Sara Hutchinson, in which precisely because it was unreciprocated, he had the opportunity to monitor the progress of his feelings and record, often in minute detail, his daily joys and sufferings. In A. J. Harding's phrase, Coleridge "became in some sense a connoisseur of his own passions".<sup>5</sup> Another important fac-

tor in the growth of Coleridge's ideas about feeling was his remarkable ability to introspect on bodily processes and sensations, where he traced some of the obscure but highly important connections between physical and mental aspects of experience. In fact Coleridge coined the term "psychosomatic" (in his late unpublished essay on the Passions) some thirty years before the first occurrence recorded by the *OED* for 1854.<sup>6</sup>

Thus a more complete theory of emotion is apparent in Coleridge's earlier writings, particularly in the Notebooks. I will trace some of its implications by examining a few representative passages, and sketch briefly how Coleridge built a theory out of his own experience.

A central feature of the attempts of both Wordsworth and Coleridge to write a new kind of poetry was to purge poetic diction of false feeling. As Coleridge put the matter in October 1800, the *Lyrical Ballads* were "an experiment to see how far those passions, which alone give any value to extraordinary Incidents, were capable of interesting, in & for themselves, in the incidents of common Life" (*CL* I: 631). Many of the poems in that collection are, accordingly, concerned primarily with recording states of feeling, often of a highly pathetic kind: the griefs of the "Female Vagrant" or Martha Ray, maternal fear in "The Idiot Boy" or maternal love in "The Mad Mother." As motivating powers in the behaviour of Wordsworth's characters, such "passions" are portrayed in a heightened, sometimes melodramatic style. In other poems, as Wordsworth remarked in the Preface, "It has also been part of my general purpose to attempt to sketch characters under the influence of less impassioned feelings." This attempt to portray the emotions seems a necessary first step towards the new poetics, a way of transcending the artifice and sentiment that marred the poetry of the previous half-century; but it is also to approach the passions at a descriptive, phenomenal level.

Various comments in Coleridge's early Notebooks indicate a similar, phenomenal, understanding of feeling: for example, "Dr Darwin's Poetry," he noted in 1796, is "a succession of Landscapes or Paintings — it arrests the attention too often, and so prevents the rapidity necessary to pathos. — it . . . makes the great little" (*CN* I: 132). One of his earliest remarks on dreams carries the same implication: "Dreams sometimes useful by . . . giving to the well-grounded *fears & hopes* of the understanding the *feelings* of vivid sense" (*CN* I: 188). Other early notes on feeling, as in this example, tend to use such descriptive adjectives as *vivid*, *dim*, *distinct*, or *obscure*. Coleridge's careful attention to these aspects of feeling was preparing the ground for a more profound understanding of the processes of the mind which feelings initiate. Meanwhile, the poetry that he was writing already hints at such processes: the conversation poems, from "The Eolian Harp" to "Frost at Midnight" follow, both in overall structure and in fine detail, an inter-

nal logic of feeling beyond the delineation of states of "passion" or "pathos."

But the major turning point in Coleridge's accounts of feeling seems to occur in the second half of 1803, and is clearly the product of his characteristic perceptiveness for the workings of his own consciousness. The shift in view towards a more dynamic understanding is indicated, for example, by a note that Coleridge thought important enough to copy from an older notebook to his current one. He had remarked in 1799 on the "imperishability" of ideas associated with a print of the "Darlington Ox" (which hung in the Hutchinsons' family farm at Sockburn). It was, he had said, "a thing of nature thro' the perpetual action of the Feelings!" (CN I: 576). In 1803 the note is significantly expanded and clarified by an additional sentence:

O Heaven when I think how perishable Things, how imperishable Thoughts seem to be! — For what is Forgetfulness? + Renew the state of affection or bodily Feeling, same or similar — sometimes dimly similar / and instantly the trains of forgotten Thought rise from their living catacombs! (CN I: 1575)

Had Coleridge subsequently found memories of the print recurring involuntarily? If feeling is an active power in restoring forgotten thoughts, it can also retrieve a train of unwelcome thoughts. Coleridge describes this in two other notes during the same month (CN I: 1599, 1601). His often quoted letter to Southey, in which he claims that association of ideas depends on feeling, was also written during this period, in August 1803 (CL II: 961). His speculations in this letter, it should be noted, were prompted by a sudden involuntary memory of the room he shared with Southey in Bristol.

The relating of thoughts or ideas by feeling suggests one element of the work of imagination. But Coleridge also spoke of the modifying power of feeling, and his first hint of this occurs, again in October 1803. This is in a reference to "bulls," those self-contradictory propositions whose apparent logic fascinated Coleridge. Speaking of a dream from which he had just awoken, in which the dream image conflated with perception, he wrote

Hartley's Face & moving Lips were yet before my Eyes, & his Hum & Ha, & the Ticking of the Watch were each the other, as often happens in the passing off of Sleep — that curious modification of Ideas by each other, which is the Element of Bulls. (CN I: 1620)

Several references to Bulls show that Coleridge attributed such modification to feeling: a note of November 1803 refers to "the effect of the Passions on the reasoning power imprimis in producing Bulls" (CN I: 1643). Again (this is now 1808), speaking of men whose minds are full of incompatible ideas: such minds are "but a huge Lumber-room of

Bulls — i.e. incompatible notions . . . brought together by a feeling without a sense of connections!" (CN III: 3566).

From here Coleridge was soon generalizing to a modifying power with more productive implications. It may be noted that the term modifying, in the sense that Coleridge was to use it to help define the imagination, occurs first in September 1802, in a letter to Southey (CL II: 866); but this reference is tantalizingly brief. A clearer view of the modifying power in relation to feeling can be found in one of Coleridge's several attempts to account for his pleasure in the sight of the ships in which he was sailing to Malta in 1804. Each part combines with others, he says: for example, "the Ideas of full Sail modifying the impression of the naked Masts" (CN II: 2061). Coleridge goes on to consider a parallel role for feeling in dreams, and speculates that we may experience

a Feeling of a Person quite distinct at all times, & at certain times perfectly separable from, the Image of the Person? And that this Feeling forms a most important Link of Associations — & may be combined with the whole Story of a long Dream just as well as with one particular Form no way resembling the true Image?

The "inferences" he lists, "Madness — Bulls — Self — God — Past Life + Present; or Conscience, &c.," suggests that Coleridge attributed a primary role to feeling in a range of mental processes. In this Coleridge was beginning to implement a kind of Copernican revolution, overcoming the division between intellect and feeling that has prejudiced discussion since the time of Plato.

Several of these accounts of feeling also implicate the body. Here Coleridge, drawing on his own experience, sought to overcome a related historical division, the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. This begins at first with a sense of the intimate relationship of mind and body. A note of 1803 (once again!) appears to suggest an unconscious, bodily process operating in advance of the work of thought: "Nothing affects me much at the moment it happens" he remarked,

For a Thing at the moment is but a Thing of the moment / it must be taken up into the mind, diffuse itself thro' the whole multitude of Shapes & Thoughts, not one of which it leaves untinged — between wch & it some new Thought is not engendered / this a work of Time / but the Body feels it quicken with me — (CN I: 1597)

Is the process of bodily feeling what he means by "quicken"? A letter of January 1804 provides a more explicit version of this process: "It should seem," he says, "as if certain Trains of Feeling acted, on me, underneath my own Consciousness," adding that such feelings "connect & combine with my bodily sensations." This process contrasts with his apparent equanimity on the surface in the

face of bad news or unpleasant situations (CL II: 1046; cf. CL II: 897, 1028, 1029). Coleridge's insistence on the participation of the body and the feelings in the life of the mind (a fact he knew only too well from his own experience), anticipates Freud, as some commentators have suggested.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that Coleridge was making these notes, he was also describing his love for Sara Hutchinson in terms that give an even wider scope to feeling. This was the domain in which Coleridge mainly explored (at great cost to himself) extreme states of feeling. It came to seem that not only the definition of the self, but its very survival, depended on understanding the nature of the feelings that beset him. But it is here that the unconscious component of feelings, their many hidden connections with thought and bodily processes, their indeterminacy, place an insuperable barrier in the way of full understanding (for all our advances in the techniques for studying psychological phenomena, we are perhaps no further ahead in this respect than Coleridge). The core self, for Coleridge in 1801, existed in terms of feeling: "By deep feeling we make our *Ideas dim* — & this is what we mean by our Life — ourselves . . . the Feeling is deep & steady — and this I call *I*" (CN I: 921). If this is true, then the self is also vulnerable to powerful feelings that seem to link all thoughts. As Coleridge put it in 1810,

My love of [Asra] is not so much in my Soul, as my Soul in it. It is my whole Being wrapt up into one Desire, all the Hopes & Fears, Joys & Sorrows, all the Powers, Vigor & Faculties of my Spirit abridged into <one> perpetual Inclination. To bid me not love you were to bid me annihilate myself — for to love you is all I know of my Life, as far as my Life is an object of my Consciousness or my free Will. (CN III: 3996)

This recreation of the self through love is a radical example of the relating and modifying powers of feeling. In a note of 1805, Coleridge called this entity the "abstract Self," and asked: "Will not this prove it to be a *deeper* Feeling, and of such intimate affinity with ideas, so to modify them and become one with them" (CN II: 2441). The difficulties that lie in the way of grasping the implications of this conception of the self are put by Coleridge in another note of 1810: "all that is characteristic of his Nature as Man, is seated in the incommunicable part of his Being, of which we know that it is not his Body, nor of it; tho' it may well be, that his body is *of* it" (CN III: 3962).

Given that Coleridge's love for Sara was not capable of fulfilment, the "abridgement" of the self in love turns love into a kind of prison, in which the self is threatened by auto-destruction:

myself is therefore only not a feeling for reckless Despair, because she is its object / Self in me derives its sense of Being from having this one absolute Object, including all

others that but for it would be thoughts, notions, irrelevant fancies — yea, my own Self would be — utterly deprived of all connection with her — only more than a thought, because it would be a Burthen — a haunting of the daemon, Suicide. (CN II: 3148)

In loving Sara in this way, Coleridge was of course replicating the over-investment he made in loving other people throughout his adult life, his "sheet anchors" such as Tom Poole and Wordsworth. While these pathological feelings evidently owe their origin to childhood deprivations, as McFarland and others have argued,<sup>8</sup> yet it was out of such experiences that Coleridge developed some unique and highly productive psychological insights.

Perhaps the major insight that Coleridge made through love was to redefine the self as a process of which we have some awareness, but which exists primarily beyond consciousness. In so doing, he used a particular syntax which is repeated in several notes in different forms. Both the notes of 1810 that I quoted above provide examples: in the first he says "My love of [Asra] is not so much in my Soul, as my Soul in it." In the second Coleridge remarks that man's Being "is not his Body, nor of it; tho' it may well be, that his body is *of* it." A note of 1807 provides the most complex example:

All our Thoughts all that we abstract from our consciousness & so form the Phaenomenon Self is a Shadow, its whole Substance is the dim yet powerful sense that it is but a Shadow, & ought to belong to a Substance / but this Substance can have no marks, no discriminating Characters, no hic est, ille non est / it is simply Substance — & this deepest felt during particular phaenomena with a consciousness that the phaenomenon is in us but it not in the phaenomenon, for which alone we yet value the phaenomenon, constitutes the craving of True Love. (CN II: 3026)

In saying that the "Substance" self has "no marks, no discriminating Characters, no hic est, ille non est," Coleridge is not only saying that it lies beyond consciousness but indicating also that it lies outside the boundaries of space, which define our conscious experience. It is worth noting that elsewhere in Coleridge's notes on feeling, feeling is described (at least in some dimensions) as pointing beyond time as well: for example, "All intense passions have faith in their own eternity, & thence in the eternity of their objects —" (CN III: 4056). This helps to make clearer what Coleridge then says: that in love, which awakens the "substance" self, there is a consciousness of phenomena (such as the discontent or sensuality mentioned at the end of this note), but that love is not those phenomena. Such phenomena are symbols of a process that lies beyond consciousness, and which for that reason cannot be defined by space or time. Whether this is exactly what Coleridge meant is not certain: the *it* in his phrase "but *it* not in the phaenomenon" is ambivalent, but seems to refer back to

the "Substance" self which is called into being by love, as the note goes on to say: "Love a sense of Substance / Being seeking to be self-conscious . . ."

This and many other notes show that love provided laboratory conditions, as it were, for understanding the work that feeling performs. A range of theoretical implications then follow which, as I have suggested, bridge some of the gaps in the later published accounts of the imagination: but it is clear that these were implications that Coleridge first felt "on the pulse" (to use Keats's phrase). Where there are gaps, in fact, they are of two kinds: the first kind occurs because Coleridge dropped the connecting links that implicate feeling when he came to write those definitive statements about the imagination in Chapter 13 of the *Biographia* or *The Statesman's Manual*. But the second kind of gap is due to the nature of feeling itself, the sense that the organizing power of feeling resides within the substance self, beyond consciousness, yet setting the agenda for the directions that will be taken by thought. The most important feelings necessarily lie beyond what can be consciously grasped or expressed:

what are Words but air? & impulses of air? O who has deeply felt, deeply, deeply! & not fretted & grown impatient at the inadequacy < of Words to Feeling, > of the symbol to the Being? — Words — what are they but a subtle *matter*? and the meanness of Matter must they have, & the Soul must pine in them, even as the Lover who can press kisses only on . . . the garment of one indeed beloved / (CN II: 2998)

To the extent that this self beyond words is implicated in reading, embodied in the reader's feelings, the modifying power of the text over the reader's thoughts and concerns during the act of reading is clearly another dimension of the process of imagination. In reading we are led to reposition the self, confronted by that "*willing* sense of the insufficingness of the *self* for itself" (to borrow one of Coleridge's remarks on love from "The Improvisatore"); and, to paraphrase: "this deepest felt during particular moments of reading with a consciousness that the reading process is in us but the process is not in the moment."

Since the decline of the New Critics, Coleridge's influence in setting the terms within which literary studies are conducted has diminished. But if one Coleridge is disappearing, another one may be on the horizon. Speaking only of Coleridge's poetics, I would argue that there is a new relevance in the model of reading that he suggests. The metaphysical beliefs that underpinned Coleridge's assumptions about the role that the imagination must perform — these are seen by Paul De Man and others as the pathos of an idealism that is no longer tenable. That may be the case. But in grounding his account on the phenomena of experience, and the feelings in particular, Coleridge provided a view of the reading process which is still just as

relevant, and whose details remain to be worked out and tested in practice. In Coleridge's account of the modifying power of feeling and the "substance" self as a domain of feeling beyond consciousness, together with several other aspects that I haven't discussed in this paper — such as his analysis of the role of passion in poetic diction, the paradoxes of feeling (both in time and timeless, both active and passive) — lie several key issues that have so far received little or no examination in the reader response literature, but which seem promising departure points for reconsidering the constructive powers of the mind involved in reading.

I finish with one further passage from Coleridge, showing that to extrapolate from Coleridge's remarks on love to a theory of poetics is authorized by Coleridge himself. Speaking of love in one of his 1811-12 lectures, Coleridge was reported as saying that

In everything blending the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight — Who should dare then to stand alone and vaunt himself in himself sufficient? In poetry . . . it was the blending of passion with order & still more in morals & more than all was it [in] the exclusive attachment of the Sexes to each other.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1966-71). Hereinafter *CL*.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Notebooks*, ed. K. Coburn (Princeton and London, 1957-90). Hereinafter *CN*.

<sup>3</sup> Humphry House, *Coleridge The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (London, 1952), p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss this aspect of the Mariner in "Guilt and Death: the Predicament of the Ancient Mariner," *Studies in English Literature*, 24 (1984), 633-653.

<sup>5</sup> *Coleridge and the Idea of Love* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> See *Inquiring Spirit*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London, 1951), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Kathleen Coburn, *The Self Conscious Imagination* (Oxford, 1974), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (Princeton, 1981), p. 113 ff; Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (New York, 1971), pp. 405-406.

<sup>9</sup> *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London, 1987), I: 314.