

CHAPTER 6

“Too soon transplanted”

Coleridge and the forms of dislocation

David S. Miall

In 1797 and 1798 Coleridge wrote two poems with rather similar topics, “To the Rev. George Coleridge” and “Frost at Midnight.” The first is largely unread while the second is frequently and repeatedly anthologized, and is generally considered a significant part of the canon of English poetry. As a “Conversation Poem” the second seems to invite the participation of the reader; in the first, in contrast, the reader remains an observer. An analysis of the sound patterns and structure of the poems is undertaken, which shows how the poems differ at the formal level in a number of ways. Unlike the first poem, the feelings evoked in the reader by “Frost” invite self-referential exploration. It is argued that this process typifies literary works that become canonical.

To the Rev. George Coleridge
of Ottery St. Mary, Devon With some Poems

*Notus in fratres animi paterni.
Hor. Carm. lib. II. 2.*

A bless'd lot hath he, who having passed
His youth and early manhood in the stir
And turmoil of the world, retreats at length,
With cares that move, not agitate the heart,
To the same dwelling where his father dwelt;
And haply views his tottering little ones
Embrace those aged knees and climb that lap,
On which first kneeling his own infancy
Lisp'd its brief prayer. Such, O my earliest Friend!
10 Thy lot, and such thy brothers too enjoy.
At distance did ye climb Life's upland road,
Yet cheer'd and cheering: now fraternal love
Hath drawn you to one centre. Be your days
Holy, and blest and blessing may ye live!

To me the Eternal Wisdom hath dispens'd
A different fortune and more different mind –
Me from the spot where first I sprang to light
Too soon transplanted, ere my soul had fix'd
Its first domestic loves; and hence through life
20 Chasing chance-started friendships. A brief while
Some have preserv'd me from life's pelting ills;

Frost at Midnight

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owl's cry
Came loud – and hark, again! loud as before.
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
10 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
20 Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

UNCORRECTED PROOFS
© JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY

But, like a tree with leaves of feeble stem,
 If the clouds lasted, and a sudden breeze
 Ruffled the boughs, they on my head at once
 Dropped the collected shower; and some most false,
 False and fair-foliag'd as the Manchineel,
 Have tempted me to slumber in their shade
 E'en mid the storm; then breathing subtlest damps,
 Mix'd their own venom with the rain from Heaven,
 30 That I woke poison'd! But, all praise to Him
 Who gives us all things, more have yielded me
 Permanent shelter; and beside one Friend,
 Beneath the impervious covert of one oak,
 I've rais'd a lowly shed, and know the names
 Of Husband and of Father; not unhearing
 Of that divine and nightly-whispering Voice,
 Which from my childhood to maturer years
 Spake to me of predestinated wreaths,
 Bright with no fading colours!

Yet at times

40 My soul is sad, that I have roamed through life
 Still most a stranger, most with naked heart
 At mine own home and birth-place: chiefly then,
 When I remember thee, my earliest Friend!
 Thee, who didst watch my boyhood and my youth;
 Didst trace my wanderings with a father's eye;
 And boding evil yet still hoping good,
 Rebuk'd each fault, and over all my woes
 Sorrow'd in silence! He who counts alone
 The beatings of the solitary heart,
 50 That Being knows, how I have lov'd thee ever,
 Lov'd as a brother, as a son rever'd thee!
 Oh! 'tis to me an ever new delight,
 To talk of thee and thine: or when the blast
 Of the shrill winter, rattling our rude sash,
 Endears the cleanly hearth and social bowl;
 Or when, as now, on some delicious eve,
 We in our sweet sequester'd orchard-plot
 Sit on the tree crook'd earth-ward; whose old boughs,
 That hang above us in an arborous roof,
 60 Stirr'd by the faint gale of departing May,
 Send their loose blossoms slanting o'er our heads!

Nor dost not thou sometimes recall those hours,
 When with the joy of hope thou gavest thine ear
 To my wild firstling-lays. Since then my song
 Hath sounded deeper notes, such as beseem
 Or that sad wisdom folly leaves behind,
 Or such as, tuned to these tumultuous times,
 Cope with the tempest's swell!

These various strains,
 Which I have fram'd in many a various mood,
 70 Accept, my Brother! and (for some perchance
 Will strike discordant on thy milder mind)
 If aught of error or intemperate truth
 Should meet thine ear, think thou that riper Age
 Will calm it down, and let thy love forgive it!

But O! how oft,
 How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
 Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
 To watch that fluttering stranger! and as oft
 With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
 Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
 Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
 30 From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
 So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
 With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
 Most like articulate sounds of things to come!
 So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
 Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
 And so I brooded all the following morn,
 Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
 Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
 Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
 40 A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
 For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,
 Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
 My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
 Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
 Fill up the interspers'd vacancies
 And momentary pauses of the thought!
 My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
 With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
 50 And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
 And in far other scenes! For I was reared
 In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
 And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
 But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
 By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
 Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
 Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
 And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
 The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
 60 Of that eternal language, which thy God
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.
 Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
 Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
 Whether the summer clothe the general earth
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
 Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
 70 Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,
 Or if the secret ministry of frost
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
 Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

1. Introduction

During 1797 and most of 1798 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) was living in a cottage on the edge of Nether Stowey, a small town in rural Somerset on the edge of the Quantock Hills. He celebrated his domestic situation in several poems. Two of these, of similar style and length, compare his current situation with his unhappy childhood: "To the Rev. George Coleridge," written in May 1797, and "Frost at Midnight," dated February 1798. Both poems are effective in providing a vivid sense of Coleridge's feelings, both in the present and in the past, and both enable us to share Coleridge's perspective on who he was in the past and how he comes to be who he is in the present. Yet the first poem is now read by almost no-one except the Coleridge scholar, whereas the second is frequently and repeatedly read, not only by scholars, but by numerous students and ordinary readers, since it has for many years been reprinted in every major anthology of English poetry.¹ Its prominence is also evident in the considerable secondary literature on the poem: especially over the last thirty years, "Frost at Midnight" has been the focus of numerous critical articles and chapters in books (e.g., Everest, Wheeler, Eldridge, Miall 1989; Fulford, Plug, Magnuson).

Why has the fate of the poems been so different? In this essay I assess some of the differences between the poems in their language, structure, and rhetoric. I will argue that at each of these levels the poems create an implied reader, but despite the similarities in the topics of the poems, one reader remains an observer whereas the other becomes a participant. I will conclude with some suggestions about how far this distinction might underlie the question of literary evaluation.

2. Rhetoric and figurative structures

The rhetoric of these two poems is characteristic of Coleridge. For most of the twentieth century a small group of Coleridge's poems, termed Conversation Poems, has held a central place in the canon of British Romantic writing. Of these, four are frequently anthologized: "The Eolian Harp" (first written in 1795), "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), "Frost at Midnight" (1798), and "Dejection: An Ode" (1802). The term Conversation Poem originates with Coleridge: a poem first printed in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) is entitled by him "The Nightingale; a Conversational Poem, written in April, 1798." It was the early twentieth century critic George McLean Harper who in an essay of 1925 (reprinted in Abrams) first iden-

1. Usually reprinted from the text of Coleridge's final version, published in 1829. However, the first version of 1798 has been printed in some recent anthologies, e.g., Wu (1994). In this paper my discussion is based on the 1829 text.

tified eight of Coleridge's poems as sharing the conversational mode: his term "Conversation Poem" has been employed to identify the poems ever since (as a contrast to Coleridge's "supernatural poems": "Kubla Khan," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel"). Although "To the Rev. George Coleridge" shares most of the major stylistic and formal characteristics of this group, Harper did not include it in his list, a decision that implicitly excludes the poem from canonical status.

Each of the Conversation Poems in Harper's canon engages with Coleridge's immediate perceptions, following them as if in "real time" as the poem itself unfolds. Each also appears to be addressed to a named person, such as his wife Sara Coleridge ("The Eolian Harp"), his sleeping infant Hartley Coleridge ("Frost at Midnight"), or William and Dorothy Wordsworth ("The Nightingale"), although each poem is a kind of dramatic monologue in which the addressee is given no voice. In most of the poems, however, Coleridge appears to invite the addressee to notice his perceptions and to empathise with and benefit from them. In this way they appear to require a response from the reader, even though the reader's situation might be quite different from that of the poet. I will suggest that this apparent accessibility of the poems underlies the high valuation placed upon them over the last seventy years. "To the Rev. George Coleridge," in contrast, while addressed to Coleridge's eldest brother (which would appear to qualify it as a Conversation Poem), forestalls the participatory response that is called for in the more successful Conversation Poems.² Leaving the reader with nothing to do other than witness the progress of Coleridge's feelings and his accompanying claims, may be responsible for the obscurity in which this poem has remained.

As a child, Coleridge spent his early years in a small town in rural Devonshire, where his father was minister of the church. But he was removed to school in London at the age of nine, following the death of his father. Coleridge's resulting homesickness and fear of the headmaster, The Rev. James Bowyer, formed a key memory for the remainder of his life. This memory is a critical reference point for both poems. In "To the Rev. George Coleridge" we read: "Me from the spot where first I sprang to light / [was] Too soon transplanted" (17–18). In "Frost at Midnight," having referred to his "sweet birth-place" (28) Coleridge remarks that "I was reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim" (51–52). In the first poem

2. Kelvin Everest (one of the few critics to notice it) remarks that the poem "is in many respects a conversation poem, but it fails because Coleridge is too nervous about his audience to get talking" (p. 151). This is not quite correct, I think: Coleridge fills the poem with too many abstractions (especially the generalizations of the opening), and it lacks that sense of immediacy, of thought unfolding in the present, that is notable in the Conversation Poems. Humphry House, in one of the best early accounts of "Frost at Midnight," remarks that "the poem as a whole leaves us with a quite extraordinary sense of the mind's *very being*." (p. 81).

Coleridge frames his experience as a case history; the second poem on the other hand models a process to which we have all have been liable. The first attempts, but largely fails, to elicit a general truth from Coleridge's specific experience; the second makes the specific experience an occasion for the resonance of some parallel experience of the reader. In the first, some information about Coleridge's background seems obligatory to understand the poem; in the second, such information is incidental – helpful but inessential. How does Coleridge manage to engage his readers in the second poem but exclude them from the first? I will argue that the formal qualities of the later poem are what chiefly distinguish it and constitute the basis for the high valuation now placed upon it.

In the first poem, the addressee, George Coleridge, is explicitly invited to sympathize with Coleridge's position. George has fared well in life, but to Coleridge "Eternal Wisdom hath dispens'd / A different fortune and more different mind" (15–16). George, in other words, has not experienced the suffering that Coleridge has: George has returned to the parental home, where "fraternal love / Hath drawn you to one centre" (12–13). One of the unsatisfying features of the poem is this: that an inadequate and equivocal account is given for the states of mind that Coleridge reports; moreover, Coleridge's account is not quite consistent with what we know of his actual history. First, the poem begins with a general view of what makes for domestic happiness:

A blesséd lot hath he, who having passed
His youth and early manhood in the stir
And turmoil of the world, retreats at length,
With cares that move, not agitate the heart,
To the same dwelling where his father dwelt. (1–5)

Although this evokes a pleasant scene, and echoes briefly the familiar Romantic topos of the errant journey to acquire wisdom, Coleridge's continuation is contradictory. The father that appears to be deceased in line 5 is alive greeting his grandchildren in the next lines, since the returner now

haply views his tottering little ones
Embrace those agéd knees and climb that lap,
On which first kneeling his own infancy
Lisp'd its brief prayer. (6–9)

While this seems a trivial oversight, the language of the opening lines includes words suggesting that the feelings of Coleridge are over-determined: the generic figure does not return but "retreats," implying a weakness; and the "tottering" of the infants connotes a vulnerability consistent with retreating. The speaker's slip, creating a father who is both absent and present, implies a wound for which this wish-fulfilling scenario acts as a consolation. This semantic contradiction is con-

firmed by a further mistake. He continues: “Such, O my earliest Friend! / Thy lot, and such thy brothers too enjoy” (9–10). Since their father died in 1781, seven years before the first of the brothers even married (James and Luke married in 1788; George in 1796), the “lot” that Coleridge claims to see is historically impossible. His brothers only returned home and only produced offspring many years after their father’s death.

In beginning the poem with a general claim about human life (he, who retreats to his father’s house), Coleridge creates observers of his readers, since few will readily share his interest in this particular scenario. Moreover, since the opening lines of the poem are internally inconsistent, marked by feelings for which inadequate cause is apparent, and historically at odds with the facts (although this last problem is evident only to those familiar with Coleridge’s family history), the meaning of the scenario that Coleridge invites us to contemplate appears to lie elsewhere, outside the lines themselves. The most obtrusive feature unsettling the lines is the absent-present father, but this prefigures a larger problem later in the poem, as I will show.

The opening lines of “Frost at Midnight,” in contrast, make no general claim. Like the other Conversation Poems, the poem starts with an observation on the present moment, thus immediately locating the reader within the speaker’s perceptions:

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owl’s cry
Came loud – and hark, again! loud as before. (1–3)

As the lines unfold, Coleridge provides sufficient information for us to locate his position and understand his perspective. “The inmates of my cottage,” he says, are “all at rest” (4); he is alone, except for an infant sleeping in the same room. Just outside the cottage are “Sea, hill, and wood,” and “populous village” (10–11); yet, he can hear nothing of them in the “extreme silentness” (10). The opening lines are not unproblematic, but they invite the reader first to share the perspective, then to consider what meaning lies beyond the experiences being reported. In this way the reader comes to participate in the unfolding of the poem’s meaning, not merely witness it as I suggested is the case in “To the Rev. George Coleridge.”

This participatory response is invited in at least the following ways. First, in the opening line “The Frost performs its secret ministry,” the reader (once the location of this event on a cold winter’s evening in a cottage is grasped) will find two perceptions created. The literal work of the frost is being “performed,” perhaps in creating patterns on the window pane, or rime on the vegetation outside the cottage; yet, this is also a “secret ministry,” being carried out on grounds that appear to be sacred or at least benign, but whose purposes are secret, hidden from us. Second, we are aware by the fifth or sixth line of the poem, that the function of the

"owllet's cry" has been to disturb the speaker and bring him to self-awareness, interrupting his "Abstruser musings." But while we are put in possession of the event, it is left unclear what the moment means. Given the speaker's evident unease with the silence,

'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. (8–10)

it seems that the speaker is also unclear about what has caused his response to being interrupted. But, unlike the "retreat" that opens "To the Rev. George Coleridge," this experience is both simpler and more common: while preoccupied with our own thoughts at night, something disturbs us and makes us attend to our surroundings, but as we listen we cannot at first tell what it is that "vexes" us. Coleridge seems to attribute his unease to the inaudibility of "Sea, hill, and wood" and "populous village" (10–11), but this seems insufficient; it is a symptom, not the cause of the unease.

As readers, that unease has now become ours. We too are motivated to look further in search of some deeper point of origin. In the remainder of the poem we continue to follow the train of Coleridge's thoughts. His unease prompts a memory of his childhood experiences at school, and we infer that being confined in school, where he daydreamed of his home village, has some implications for his lack of ease with his surroundings now. But, he tells us (addressing his infant son), Hartley will enjoy a different experience: as he grows up he will be a wanderer amidst the scenes of nature. Thus, Coleridge tells Hartley, "all seasons shall be sweet to thee" (65), a conclusion that may contrast with the position of Coleridge himself, which appears to remain unresolved. However, the poem returns us to its original point of departure, with "the secret ministry of frost" now enhanced by the "silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" (72–74).

Whether or not the reader has experienced alienation at school similar to that of Coleridge, the psychological processes traced by the poem illuminate a central issue faced by us all: how the childhood we remember relates to the adult identity of which we are aware in the present. This, at least, is one way of construing "Frost at Midnight"; the poem's critics have proposed various other readings of the poem, some of which are compatible neither with this reading nor with each other.³ Yet the poem continues to attract new generations of readers who, while engaging

3. There is another argument that could be made here. Although critical interpretations of a text sometimes appear to be mutually incompatible, it is also necessary for critics to take account of the same notable phrases or lines and underlying structural features of the text. Canonical texts are "strong" in this respect, compelling attention to a specific set of features (cf. Zöllner, Miall and Kuiken, in press). This would be an example of a nomothetic law, based on the for-

with Coleridge's experience, appear able to construe the poem in ways that reflect on or illuminate their own experience. That the poem appears to work in this way with little or no introduction is not predicted by its critics. Harper, for instance, thought we required knowledge of who was addressed in the Conversation Poems: "They cannot be even vaguely understood unless the reader knows what persons Coleridge has in mind" (Abrams 145). Kelvin Everest offers a different emphasis: referring to the years during which the poems were written, he suggests that "we do not properly understand the poetry without a knowledge of the full range of experience that it draws on" (p. 11). Useful though such informing contexts may be for enriching understanding of it, they appear not to be obligatory. The independence of "Frost at Midnight" from its contexts, as its frequent appearance in anthologies bears witness, points to a dimension of the poem's meaning that is, I believe, central to its high evaluation.

Having engaged the reader's participation in the experience that unfolds at the beginning of "Frost at Midnight," the remainder of the poem then offers a series of significant perspectives in which to locate that experience and begin to understand something of what it means. That experience, to repeat, is Coleridge's inability to connect with the life around him beyond the cottage room where he sits at midnight, a sense that breaks in upon him and appears to disrupt his "musings." Anxiety about isolation has probably been felt by every reader of the poem. But in the thought process that follows we are able to review such anxiety through a series of windows, each opening a view on basic questions of development. What makes the series coherent is that each, to put it abstractly, offers an underlying schema of reciprocation;⁴ and, insofar as these offer resolutions to the problem of isolation, the schemata proceed in a series from the inauthentic to the wholly authentic.

First, turning to the fire burning in the grate, Coleridge sees a film of ash fluttering there. Since this is the only thing moving in the room, he projects onto it his sense of isolation; endowed with "dim sympathies with me who live" it becomes "a companionable form" (18–19). As a model of reciprocation, however, this is immediately found inadequate: it is "the idling Spirit" that

By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought. (21–23)

In other words, the feeling for an animate world beyond himself, the feeling that is thwarted in the opening section of the poem, is here projected onto an unworthy

mal properties of the literary text: only texts possessing such determinative features survive the ruthless processes of pruning involved in canon formation (van Peer 1997).

4. For some further helpful commentary on images of reciprocation in this and other Coleridge poems, see Lau 1983.

object. As an escape from his solipsistic prison, this will not do. An earlier version of the poem is more explicit about the source of such projections: Coleridge previously called them "wild reliques of our childish Thought," alluding to the syncretic tendency that Freud was later to term the "omnipotence of thought."⁵ But as a source of superstition, Coleridge is reminded, as he remarks in a footnote, that such a fluttering film of ash is "supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend"; and this in turn reminds him of similar occasions at school where he watched the fire in the schoolroom. This leads to his second image of reciprocity. Sitting at his desk at school he would recall life in the village from which he was removed so early. In particular, his memory seems to focus on the sound of the church bells. These "stirred and haunted me / With a wild pleasure" (31–32), apparently evoking in him a powerful sense of connectedness to some future fulfilment, since he describes their sound as "falling on mine ear / Most like articulate sounds of things to come!" (32–33). But this experience is now in the past, recoverable only in memory, so it too is inadequate as a model of reciprocity, although less fanciful than the first. It is when Coleridge's attention returns to the present that he develops the third schema. Turning to consider the baby sleeping in the room beside him, he proposes a different upbringing for his child, one in which he will be a wanderer amidst natural scenes, and will thus "learn far other lore" (50). This culminating view is reciprocal in several mutually supporting ways: nature itself offers a pattern of reciprocity in which clouds "image in their bulk both lakes and shores / And mountain crags" (57–58); the child will "see and hear" (58) (thus implicitly answering the isolation of the poem's opening) the natural scene which is the "language" of God (60); and God as "Teacher" enables and invites reciprocity: "he shall mould / Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask." (63–64).⁶ The insight thus

5. Freud (1955), p. 240. Childhood thought is further discussed in Miall 1989. Successive versions of the poem show extensive revision to lines 19–23 in particular: these are discussed by Jack Stillinger, who argues that the final version of these lines represents "a complete reversal. Every suggestion of interactive mental creativity has been removed, and the focus is entirely on the trivial and bizarre" (p. 59).

6. Not all readers have been convinced by Coleridge's peroration here: Geoffrey Yarlott, for instance, finds that in this passage "the metaphysic ... obtrudes perhaps too openly" (p. 116). Frederick Kirchoff is not convinced by the figure of the child as wanderer: "the phrase fails to embed Hartley in the natural world ... The fate Coleridge promises his son is remarkably like his own"; that is, the figure of Hartley "is an idealized image of Coleridge himself, the son able to function without a human father" (p. 375). Tim Fulford, on the other hand, in a remark that anticipates my comments on phonetic symbolism below, suggests the following justification: "Poetry, as the discoverer of harmony between apparently unrelated words through sound-effects, could be seen as an approximation to the words of God, in which sound and sense, signifier and signified were one living whole, not arbitrarily related" (p. 25). As Coleridge puts it in an earlier poem:

achieved is then directed to rereading the world outside the cottage in the last ten lines of the poem, ending with the highly appropriate image of reciprocity, the “silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon” (73–74).

The progress of the poem from inauthentic to authentic models of reciprocity is perhaps the backbone on which the poem as a whole depends. As such, the poem’s structure is progressive, modelling through this series of images a sequence of thought that begins in the poem’s opening line and culminates in the last, and does so in ways that require no special knowledge of the reader. The predicament addressed by the poem appears to be a universal one, and while the putative solution may not be agreeable to every reader, the processes of thought through which the solution emerges involve modes of feeling, memory, and anticipation that are available to all readers as they consider the relation of the self to the wider world beyond.⁷

If we turn back to “To the Rev. George Coleridge,” a comparison of the different sections of the poem reveals no such backbone sustaining the development of a single, complex process of thought. Instead, continuing the problem we saw in the opening lines of the poem, there are several inconsistencies across the poem as a whole. These suggest that the sentiment of the poem, which may be all that binds it together, is a fragile one, and that behind the impetus that creates its main sequence of images Coleridge is being pulled in contradictory directions.

Coleridge has opened the poem by celebrating the domestic happiness of his brothers. In the second paragraph of the poem (lines 14–39), Coleridge turns to his own case. As in “Frost at Midnight” he shows us that his difficulties in life have their origin in childhood: he was “Too soon transplanted” (18). This barely noticeable (i.e. dead) metaphor unfortunately awakens to life in the light of his next series of metaphors: within four lines Coleridge introduces an elaborate metaphor of his

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
For infant minds.

(*Destiny of Nations*, ll. 18–20)

The view Coleridge offers here is elaborated by James McKusick (pp. 30–31).

7. Eldridge, who sees in the poem a model of how one might live, suggests: “Coleridge’s account of general subjunctive features of human experience is plausibly *not* a special one, *is* plausibly applicable to human beings in general, in so far as the experiences of desire, frustration, and recollective calm which he records occur *involuntarily*, despite his best efforts to plot his life in such a way as to prevent their recurrence” (pp. 224–5). Michael Holstein also finds in this and the other Conversation Poems a power to generalize to the reader: “Because these poems habitually move from tedium or desolation to joy – a ritual of thought – they provide an imitable structure that offers a means to the sacred to others” (p. 218).

friends as trees who sheltered him from storms, or failed to do so. The metaphors conflict by positioning Coleridge first as a plant, then as a human object beneath a plant. Thus, unlike the metaphors of "Frost at Midnight," the connotations of these metaphors fail to converge upon a sense of the larger issues at work in the poem.

The trees metaphor itself may appear effective at first sight: Rosemary Ashton has remarked that "The sustained metaphor of trees giving shelter is cleverly managed; it comes naturally to Coleridge to think of himself as needing protection" (p. 98). However, Coleridge himself criticized it in a letter shortly after the poem was published, noting that "the metaphor on the diverse sorts of friendship is *hunted down*" (*Letters* I.334). His comment suggests that a degree of mechanical effort went into forcing the metaphor to work: first, trees that have sheltered him; second, trees that feebly bent, dropping "the collected shower" upon him (25); third, the fearful Manchineel that dropped its poison on him while he slept; and, finally, the oak that signifies his present true friend (Tom Poole at Nether Stowey).⁸ Poetic use of the Manchineel had been interdicted by his teacher, the Rev. Bowyer, according to Coleridge's account of his schooldays published in 1817, "as suiting equally well with too many subjects" (*Biographia*, I.10) but this failed to inhibit Coleridge from using it not only in this poem but in several other contexts over the years.⁹ Yet the Manchineel image suggests a cause for Coleridge's difficulties that remains unexpressed and out of sight. It prompts us to ask either what friend treated Coleridge so poorly, or what grief caused him to place such an extreme interpretation on a friend's behaviour.¹⁰ In either case the poem fails to answer; it provides nothing adequate to the weight of the metaphor. On the contrary, the Manchineel problem, whatever that is, remains like an ulcer in the poem,

8. The contrast drawn by Ronald A. Sharp between Coleridge's earlier and mature poems is apposite here. In a poem such as "To the Rev. George Coleridge" (not discussed by Sharp), Coleridge compares human life with nature: "human affairs bear a certain resemblance to natural processes ... man is in some ways curiously like nature. Thus one may trace in nature illuminating analogies with the human condition." The later poems incorporate nature through suggestive metaphors rather than similes; thus nature is an "eternal language" in "Frost at Midnight" (p. 29).

9. See *Lectures 1795*, p. 296; *The Friend*, I.568; *Logic*, p. 190. That the word was on the lips of the Coleridge circle during the year that he used it in this poem is shown by its appearance in a letter by Charles Lamb to Coleridge, dated September 1797: *Letters* I.123.

10. Coleridge's dependency on others (notably father figures) has also been found in "Frost at Midnight," where the "stranger" has been seen as the narcissistic missing love-object. Frederick Kirchoff's perceptive account of this, however, seems to apply more appropriately to the present context, with its overdetermined trees metaphor. Coleridge's psyche, he remarks, is "fixated on an archaic self-object, that is, in search of or dependent on external figures who can supply the goals and ideals it internally lacks and thus function not as objects *per se*, but as parts of the otherwise incomplete self" (p. 372).

unregarded and untreated, casting doubt on the validity of the rest of Coleridge's claims about his state. Moreover, as the poem continues, Coleridge prevaricates regarding his emotional condition, alternating claims to his destined fame as a poet with further, partly unexplained complaints about his alienation. The tree image, moreover, returns in a further guise, this time producing a double conflict with the friendship metaphor. As Coleridge turns to celebrate the present moment in his garden, he has apparently forgotten the metaphoric use of the tree dropping its showers or poisons, since he now praises the tree on which he sits,

whose old boughs,
That hang above us in an arborous roof,
Stirr'd by the faint gale of departing May,
Send their loose blossoms slanting o'er our heads! (58–61)

Not only does this present a literal tree, which sorts oddly with the earlier metaphor; it also repeats the image of the tree dropping something in the breeze (since the "loose" blossoms must be those that are flying off the tree like the earlier showers). This shift in the ground of the metaphor, which here is not a metaphor, could perhaps be reconciled with the earlier part of the poem by an act of rationalization, but this would, in Coleridge's words, have to be "hunted down" deliberately. Although the lines are effective in themselves, the conflict they cause damages the thematic coherence of the poem.

Other minor conflicts also weaken the poem. While Coleridge celebrates his birthplace and the domestic happiness of his brothers, especially the fatherly goodwill of his eldest brother George, he inexplicably disrupts this image halfway through the poem by asserting that he is sad and "most a stranger... / At mine own home and birth-place" (41–42) where his brother resides. Near the end of the poem he claims to write "deeper" poems, which "tuned to these tumultuous times, / Cope with the tempest's swell!" (67–68) The metaphoric meaning of tempest here (presumably political unrest and war) once again quarrels with the storm, expressed as "life's pelting ills" (21), of the earlier tree metaphor. Finally, although Coleridge claims that folly has left wisdom behind (66), his poems are still liable to "error or intemperate truth" (72), for which George is invited to forgive him.

In sum, interesting and effective though "To the Rev. George Coleridge" often is in its parts, it fails to convince as a whole on two primary grounds, both of which tend to exclude the reader. First, the connotational implications of its main metaphors are inconsistent, unlike those of "Frost at Midnight"; and, second, it suggests deeper causes for the problems sketched in the poem than anything the poem itself explains. Whereas the problem of isolation in "Frost at Midnight" is amenable to being recognized by every reader of that poem, it is not clear to the reader of "To the Rev. George Coleridge" what problem Coleridge is address-

ing, except that of being "Too soon transplanted." The poem, in other words, requires special knowledge of Coleridge for a more than superficial understanding to emerge. Even then, interpretive activity that relies on evidence outside the poem is unstable (since historical evidence is usually amenable to a variety of interpretations) and inherently indeterminable (since there is no limit in principle to what we could bring to bear on the poem). More importantly, external information can never remedy deficiencies in the poetic structure of the poem itself. The poem thus fails to propose itself to readers as an effective agent for reflecting on their own concerns, which may be a central qualification of those texts that we value most highly.

3. Structures of sound

So far I have discussed the poems in terms of their rhetorical and figurative structures. The poems can also be compared at the level of sound. Effects of phonetic patterning and meter also make a significant contribution to the meaning of the poems. But here, too, I will suggest that in "Frost at Midnight" Coleridge manages this aspect of the poem more effectively. To a greater degree than in "To the Rev. George Coleridge," the aural textures of "Frost at Midnight" tend to mirror and strengthen its semantic implications. Coleridge himself was particularly interested in metrical effects; to those who praised the metre of a poem he would lecture at length on its principles (McKim 1992). Although unfortunately no record of his comments has survived, various scattered remarks in his published writings show his concern (e.g., *Biographia*, II.66–67, 71–72). His poem "Kubla Khan" has often been singled out as perhaps the most remarkable poem in English for the power of its aural effectiveness.¹¹ Thus it is no surprise to find that "Frost at Midnight" contains a range of subtle and appropriate features at the phonetic and metrical levels. I will point to a few of these, and then show how "Frost at Midnight" can be discriminated from "To the Rev. George Coleridge" on empirical grounds.

Metrically, both poems employ the typical blank verse five-stress line of iambic feet. This sets a pattern against which significant departures are perceptible, producing a metre that may underscore aspects of a line's meaning. For example, a notable deviation occurs early in "Frost at Midnight":

11. Illuminating accounts are provided by Purves (1962) and Tsur (1987). See also valuable discussions of individual poems by Austen (1989). For a wide-ranging but more theoretical account see Marks (1981).

Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! (11–13)

The second line cited here is pronounced most appropriately with only four stresses, shown underlined as follows: “With all the numberless goings-on of life” (a stress is possible on “goings,” but seems infelicitous in the context). The sequence of four unstressed syllables that occurs in the centre of the line strikingly points up the remoteness and inaccessibility of the life outside the cottage, of which Coleridge is complaining. This effect is intensified further by the next line, with its sequence of three unstressed syllables (“Inaudible as dreams!”). A similar example occurs later in the poem. In the two adjacent lines (shown here with the stresses marked),

Fill up the interspersèd vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought! (46–47)

Coleridge again deviates metrically to produce sequences of unstressed syllables, reflecting that pause or space in which the breathing of the baby comes to his awareness. A contrasting effect is created in this line (stresses marked): “And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars” (53), where the sense of blockage (amidst the large buildings of London) is confirmed by three adjacent stresses. “Frost at Midnight” contains a number of remarkable and appropriate effects of this kind.

“To the Rev. George Coleridge,” on the other hand, appears more regular in its successive five-stress lines. Indeed, in the letter mentioning the poem quoted above, Coleridge seems concerned about this, remarking that “the versification ever & anon has too much of the rhyme or couplet cadence” (*Letters*, I.334). To examine the lines of the poem for metrical deviations is to find that few occur, and these generally appear to be without significance. Among those that seem motivated, this line (stresses added) seems one of the most effective in the poem: “Send their loose blossoms slanting o’er our heads!” (61), with its onomatopoeic sequence of unstressed syllables suggesting the light movement of the flowers in the wind. Its effectiveness is dampened, however, by a slight awkwardness in the previous line, “Stirr’d by the faint gale of departing May” (60), where it seems most natural to place a stress on “faint,” although the resulting adjacent strong stresses distract from the incipient sense of movement created by both lines. The poem contains several lines that cause doubt about the appropriate stress pattern, since each alternative seems slightly unsatisfactory. In the Miltonic “Nor dost not thou sometimes recall those hours” (62), for example, it is difficult to decide whether to stress “not”; the meter of the line seems to require it, yet it unduly emphasizes the negative, threatening to destabilize the line’s meaning. Another metrically successful effect near the end of the poem is “Or such as, tuned to these tumultuous

times, / Cope with the tempest’s swell!” (67–68), indicating restlessness by the delayed major stresses on tumultuous and tempest. Overall, however, this poem is undistinguished metrically. Coleridge was soon to write much more effectively in this respect, including “Kubla Khan,” “The Mariner,” “Christabel,” and – as I have briefly suggested – “Frost at Midnight.”

In the aural texture of poetry, not only stress patterns augment and support meaning; the choice of phonetic patterns is also of critical importance, serving to distinguish the texture of poetry from the largely random distribution of phonemes in non-literary prose. Poetic effects at this level are commonly identified in such features as assonance, alliteration, consonance, and the like, and many striking effects are due to this type of diction in “Frost at Midnight.” An equally pervasive, but less commonly studied phonetic feature, however, is the distribution of phonemes. In speaking, the various vowel sounds are located at different places along the oral tract, which also opens or closes to some degree according to the sound. For example, the vowel /i/ in *bead*¹² is pronounced at the front of the mouth with the tongue high, constricting the oral cavity; the /u/ in *food*, in contrast, is pronounced near the throat with the tongue depressed. The relative position of the vowels creates its own patterns which may make a distinctive contribution to the lines of a poem. This will be shown first at the local level, then examined for its relation to the overall tone of a poem.

In “Frost at Midnight,” to take a local example, in the line “Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores” (57) the three vowel sounds that occur at the end of each half-line, “in their bulk” and “lakes and shores,” mirror one another, since each makes a falling pattern, each vowel lower than the preceding one. This supports the semantic implication of mirroring described in the line. A falling pattern is, in fact, common to a number of figures of speech known as “linguistic freezes”;¹³ however, these usually occur singly, not in the close combination of forms apparent in Coleridge’s line. Special effects can also be created by reversing the pattern. In this line, “In the great city, pent ’mid cloisters dim” (52), Coleridge creates a rising pattern in the second half-line, with upward leaps across two vowels at “pent ’mid,” then across three vowels at “cloisters dim.” This serves to reinforce the effect of imprisonment, the vowel pattern mirroring the implied vertical pillars of the cloisters. The consonants also participate in the effect. Consonants contribute to linguistic freezes in a similar way, soft sounds (liquids, nasals)

12. In the following discussion I employ the IPA (International Phonetic Association) symbols for phonemes, except in one or two places when this might confuse readers unfamiliar with this notation.

13. See Landsberg (1995). Examples of freezes determined by initial consonant are: *here* and *there*; *now* and *then*; determined by vowel: *dribs* and *drabs*; *flip flop*. For one of several empirical studies see Pinker and Birdsong (1979).

at the beginning of word pairs typically preceding hard sounds (fricatives, plosives). Thus the reversal in the present line is also rather striking, occurring twice, at “great city” and “pent ’mid”; “cloisters dim” also suggests a rising pattern by opening with a plosive /k/ and concluding with a nasal /m/.

In “To the Rev. George Coleridge,” on the other hand, some of the more perceptible effects at the phonetic level appear either to have no relation to the semantic meaning of the lines in which they occur or are inconsistent with them. For example, in the line “Some have preserv’d me from life’s pelting ills” (21), referring to the help of friends, the rising vowel pattern at the end of the line in “from life’s pelting ills” might appear to connote safety being found in a relatively high place. As the next line makes clear, however, safety (when it occurred) was found below, beneath the branches of a tree. Similarly, the vowel profile in “climb Life’s upland road” (11) is actually a falling one, contrary to the meaning of the phrase. Where a striking pattern of rising vowels does occur, in “the Manchineel, / Have tempted me” (26–27) (with its supporting internal rhymes on /æ/ and /i/), there seems no good reason to relate the pattern to the semantic context.

The contrast of vowel or consonant positions, whether front-back, or soft-hard, can take on a figurative role in the context of a particular poem. In *Paradise Lost*, for example, I have found that narrow, front vowels tend to predominate in the description of the enclosed spaces of Hell in Book II; in contrast, in the passage on Eden in Book IV open vowels are more frequent. In “Frost at Midnight” there is a contrast between the enclosed spaces of the cottage, the schoolroom, or the city, with their negative implications, and the positive implications of the natural world through which the child will wander. Dividing the poem according to these contrasting sections (treating the following lines as negative: 1–6, 8–12, 23–26, 37–41, and 52–53), the distribution of consonants and vowels can be analysed.¹⁴ A greater frequency of hard consonants can be expected in the negative lines compared with the positive lines. This is what occurs: the difference is highly significant on a statistical test, $t(72) = 3.41$, $p < .01$. In “To the Rev. George Coleridge,” whose negative preoccupations concern Coleridge’s false friendships, his estrangement, and his errors as a poet (negative lines: 18–30, 40–42, 46–48, 65–68, 71–74), the

14. For the following study, the 24 consonants and 20 vowels are ordered following standard accounts of phonetic distributions: e.g., second formant order for high to low frequency; the vowel-space diagram for high-low and back-front; the least to most obstruent consonants (see, for example, Pinker and Birdsong; O’Grady and Dobrovolsky, pp. 28–34; Clark and Yallop, 66–69). Ranks are then assigned to each phoneme, enabling the mean ranks of vowels and consonants to be scored for each line of the two poems. This enabled, for example, statistical comparison (t -test) of vowel and consonant distributions in 55 positive and 22 negative lines in “Frost at Midnight.” Rank scores approximated a normal distribution in each of the variables studied, hence the use of parametric statistics.

same test is also significant, but less markedly: $t(72) = 1.95$, $p < .05$. On an analysis of vowels, the positive lines in "Frost at Midnight" contain a higher proportion of high, front vowels, perhaps connoting a degree of intimacy, as Reuven Tsur has suggested (1992:61), although this difference is less significant, $t(72) = 1.44$, $p < .10$. "To the Rev. George Coleridge" contains no significant differences in its vowel distribution.

It might also be expected that the more systematically phonemes are deployed in a poem, the more likely it is that characteristic clusters of vowels and consonants will occur, distinctive to the purposes of that poem. This argument follows from the work of Jakobson (1987:41–46), who proposed the theory of the "dominant," and Mukarovský, who suggested that foregrounding in literary texts occurs in a systematic and hierarchical manner (1964:20). One way of assessing the evidence is to group phonemes by type, such as the liquids and nasals, or the plosives, then look for systematic relationships between the groups. In the following analysis the frequency per line of four groups of vowels and four groups of consonants was obtained; the eight sets of frequencies were then intercorrelated. In this and previous analyses I have found patterns of negative correlations that appear typical of English poetry: for example, front and back vowels rather consistently tend not to co-occur in the same line. "To the Rev. George Coleridge" shows these typical negative correlations, but no other significant feature. In "Frost at Midnight," on the other hand, there is a significant positive correlation of front vowels with the unvoiced fricatives and aspirates, $r(72) = .259$, $p < .05$. In the opening line of the poem, for example, there are six occurrences from each vowel and consonant group (vowels, underlined: "The Frost performs its secret ministry"; consonants: "The Frost performs its secret ministry"). This provides a tonal resonance that is threaded through the rest of the poem, the front vowels suggesting perhaps that missing sense of intimacy that will be troubling to the speaker, and the unvoiced consonants a sense of absence or elusiveness that, later in the poem, is transformed into the unseen but felt dimension of God's presence in Nature. Other lines notable for a high frequency of both types of phonemes are "Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature" (17) (part of a transitional and unsatisfactory resolution), and "Himself in all, and all things in himself" (62) (the climactic affirmation of Coleridge's renewed sense of participation). There is also a significant correlation between the back vowels and the voiced fricatives and aspirates, $r(72) = .266$, $p < .01$ – the following line contains 5 and 7 examples, respectively: "Whether the summer clothe the general earth" (66).

In these ways "Frost at Midnight" appears to be a poem with a demonstrably consistent phonetic palette, one that underlies and supports the evolving moods of the poem. While readers are unlikely to be aware as they read of the subtle contributions of such phonetic patterns and contrasts (their consistent presence is only revealed by detailed analysis), yet the compatibility of the phonetic tone

with the poem's meaning is undoubtedly one of the central virtues of the poem, serving to attract generations of readers. The infrequency or contradictory nature of such effects in "To the Rev. George Coleridge" may be an additional reason for the relative obscurity of this poem.

Engaging the reader

As the central issue of this paper, I have situated the question of literary evaluation in relation to the act of reading. I have argued that it is the formal qualities that chiefly distinguish "Frost at Midnight" from "To the Rev. George Coleridge" and that have promoted it to its current canonized status. In particular, the later poem invites the reader to participate in the affective processes of the poem in a way that the earlier does not. Moreover, the meanings developed by "Frost at Midnight" appear to be at a level that enables almost any reader competent in the English language to experience and participate in the poem's processes; no special knowledge is required of Coleridge's life or situation, or of the place of the poem in literary history. This, however, is not because the poem wears its meaning on its face, as it were. While the poem reflects on issues of central significance in the emotional life of any reader,¹⁵ the key to the effectiveness of the poem is the consistency with which these issues are confronted, developed, and (at least in part) resolved. The poem can be said to recreate the reader's feelings in its own image. The poem's agency in this respect depends upon several fundamental properties of feeling (cf. Miall 1989, 1995).

First, feeling is self-referential. When a specific feature of the poem, whether a passage textured by alliteration, an image of a sleeping child, or a wish to find companionship in an inanimate object, invokes a feeling in the reader, that feeling is significant because it embodies some current concern or striving of the self (Klinger 1978; Emmons 1986). Through our feelings we mediate what is of current importance to the self, monitoring experience moment by moment, and adjusting responses and expectations in line with the self that the feeling projects. Readers are thus drawn to find resonances with their own situations within the poem, although the specific experiences or memories in question may remain below the

15. As Eldridge puts it, the poem "presents in a compressed and accessible form a picture of how one might go about meditating on one's moods in the hope of uncovering general subjunctive features of human life" (p. 215). Although my method in reaching this conclusion has been, to follow van Peer's terms, a *hermeneutic* analysis of the properties of each poem and the processes of reading they promote, it is here, in the affective relation to the reader, that we might look for a *nomothetic* law of canon formation, within the framework proposed by van Peer (1997).

level of awareness. This first process is, in itself, necessary but insufficient. It is the power that the poem has to recontextualize the reader's feelings that raise it to significance as a specifically *literary* experience. For example, I pointed to the series of reflective images in "Frost at Midnight," which answer to the speaker's need for a participatory relation to the wider world. In each, the feeling of isolation and bafflement is situated in a context that offers to overcome it: only another feeling is capable of this outcome, thus we see the speaker testing a succession of feelings. First, the reaching towards a moving but inanimate object; second, the context provided by remembering his excitement at the sound of church bells; third, the anticipated future transcendence of his child in nature. While only the third appears fully satisfactory, at each stage the reader's own feeling of isolation is placed in these informing contexts, serving to call it into question and suggest alternative meanings for it. The devices of the poem, in other words, work to defamiliarize the feeling, while at the same time they point to possible avenues for reconstruing it through the perspective of another feeling.

This is perhaps the most central, but by no means the only example of this process in the poem. Almost every three or four lines contain devices that initiate similar processes. For example, in "that solitude, which suits / Abstruser musings" (5–6), musing (daydream is a favourite topic of Coleridge's) is contextualized by the adjective "abstruser" and by the succession of /u/ sounds (five in all), a narrow back vowel. Although musing seems an appropriate activity for Coleridge late at night alone in his cottage, its positive connotations are challenged by the cloistered, even claustal, implications of this form of expression (the narrowness of the /u/ sound is thus an example of what has been termed phonetic symbolism: Fónagy 1989). That musing is unsustainable, once the owl's cry has been heard for the second time, being too narrow or fragile in the face of the anxiety that the speaker then develops (the silence "vexes meditation"), anticipates a related sense of narrowness at other key moments of the poem – the schoolroom, being "pent" in the city – but more importantly, it projects the constrictedness of the speaker's predicament which apparently prevents a relationship with the wider world outside the cottage. Having read the phrase on "musing," and been made uncomfortable, shall we say, by the defamiliarizing effect of the diction, a reader senses in the feelings it has evoked a possible context for understanding why musing is inadequate, a context that is glimpsed but not yet instantiated. The feeling, in other words, is the reader's agent for locating an appropriate context for understanding this part of the poem, and, as I have suggested, the sense of narrowness will recur and be elaborated as the poem continues to unfold. The reader is thus

UNCORRECTED PROOFS
© JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY

positioned by the poem's structure to find what is sought for,¹⁶ although what is sought becomes richer and more far-reaching the further the reader progresses into the poem. In this respect, feeling is anticipatory: at any given point in the poem it projects forward to meanings that are about to be developed or that are fulfilled later in the poem.

The coherence of "Frost at Midnight" for the reader is due in large measure to this fulfilment of a feed-forward process that is continually being initiated or renewed in every line or two of the poem. In the reader it constitutes the presence of an interactive agency, prompting hesitations and questions about the meaning of the reader's own feelings. That is, while the poem is being read or reread, the reader is able to recognize feelings that embody some significant aspect of the self. Through the agency of the poem, however, these become newly delimited; unfamiliar connections may form between these feelings and hitherto unrelated feelings or experiences. It is because this process in the reader has a characteristic integrity and completeness that we have tended to identify its agent, the poem, as possessing aesthetic unity. It does not imply an integrity in the reader, however (the process might precipitate disunity, when a reader recognizes a feeling that conflicts with a major belief system previously in place).

In conclusion, it has been the argument of this paper that, like "Frost at Midnight," the texts we have come to value highly operate on the reader to evoke feelings central to the reader's self concept, and to initiate a process of questioning and re-contextualization of those feelings through the text's rhetorical, figurative, and aural structures. While each literary text will deploy a different and partly unique array of such structures, what characterizes value in literature is the power of such texts to make each of us inquirers into the meaning of our experience (whether personal, social, cultural, or historical). We are participants in the unfolding processes of the poem, having made those processes relevant to the fate of our own feelings.¹⁷ As we read, we are caught up in processes of defamiliariza-

16. This phrase is borrowed from Kierkegaard's account of poetic inspiration, which seems to offer an instructive parallel to the reading process (1971, I.48).

17. The present argument, that the highly valued text speaks to us about our own concerns as individuals, may seem plausible only in relation to relatively recent works (e.g., Romantic and post-Romantic), where little or no background knowledge may be required. Critics such as George Steiner (1972) have claimed that the modern reader lacks the shared culture that enables an informed reading of Shakespeare or Milton. As a teacher I have found this claim frequently controverted in practice. With a little background information (required for most pre-Romantic texts) and some annotations, I have found introductory level students are often as excited and moved by *Beowulf*, Donne, or Milton, as they are by any more recent work. It seems likely, from the nature of their responses, that the formal qualities of the text provide an important gateway to their initial understanding.

tion and re-contextualization, focusing on issues that are of central interest to us as individuals; yet those same issues are amenable to different readers in different contexts across different epochs of time. Whereas a lesser text makes a requisition on our feelings or confines us to being a witness of its processes, the literature that becomes most highly valued arises from the interaction of a structurally powerful text and a responsive reader. Such a text makes us a performer (Attridge 1999) of the processes it embodies, an instrument for reflecting on and reconstruing what we are.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (ed.). 1960. *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New York NY: OUP.
- Ashton, R. 1996. *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Attridge, D. 1999. Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other. *PMLA* 114: 20–31.
- Austen, F. 1989. *The Language of Wordsworth and Coleridge*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Clark, J. & Colin Y. 1990. *An Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coleridge, S. T. 1983. *Biographia Literaria*. W. J. Bate & J. Engell (eds.). Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Coleridge, S. T. 1956–71. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. E. L. Griggs (ed.). Oxford: OUP.
- Coleridge, S. T. 1971. *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*. L. Patton & P. Mann (ed.). Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Coleridge, S. T. 1981. *Logic* J. R. de J. Jackson (ed.). Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Coleridge, S. T. 1969. *The Friend*, B. E. Rooke (ed.). Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Eldridge, R. 1983. On Knowing How To Live: Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'. *Philosophy and Literature* 7: 213–228.
- Emmons, R. 1986. Personal Strivings: An Approach to Personality and Subjective Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51: 1058–1068.
- Everest, K. 1979. *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems: 1795–1798*. Sussex: Harvester Press & New York NY: Barnes and Noble.
- Fónagy, I. 1989. The Metaphor: A Research Instrument. In *Comprehension of Literary Discourse*, D. Meutsch and R. Viehoff (ed.), 111–113. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Freud, S. 1955. The Uncanny [1919], In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVII, J. Strachey (ed.). London: The Hogarth Press.
- Fulford, T. 1991. *Coleridge's Figurative Language* Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Harper, G. McL. 1925. Coleridge's Conversation Poems. *Quarterly Review* 244: 284–298.
- Holstein, M. E. 1979. Poet into Priest: A Reading of Coleridge's 'Conversation Poems'. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 48: 209–225.
- House, H. 1953. *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951–52* London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
- Jakobson, R. 1987. *Language in Literature*. K. Pomorska and S. Rudy (ed.). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1971. *Either/Or*, trans. D. F. Swenson. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kirchoff, F. 1979. Reconstructing a Self: Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 10: 371–375.

- Klinger, E. 1978. The Flow of Thought and Its Implications for Literary Communication. *Poetics* 7: 1–25.
- Lamb, C. & Lamb M. A. 1975. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*. E. W. Marris (ed.). Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.
- Landsberg, M. E. 1995. Semantic Constraints on Phonologically Independent Freezes. In *Syntactic Iconicity and Linguistic Freezes: The Human Dimension*. M. E. Landsberg (ed.), 65–78. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lau, B. 1983. Coleridge's Reflective Moonlight. *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 23: 533–548.
- Magnuson, P. 1981. *Reading Public Romanticism*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Marks, E. R. 1981. *Coleridge on the Language of Verse*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McKim, A. E. 1992. 'An Epicure in Sound': Coleridge on the Scansion of Verse. *English Studies in Canada* 18: 287–300.
- McKusick, J. 1986. *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Miall, D. S. 1995. Anticipation and Feeling in Literary Response: A Neuropsychological Perspective. *Poetics* 23: 275–298.
- Miall, D. S. 1989. Beyond the Schema Given: Affective Comprehension of Literary Narratives. *Cognition and Emotion* 3: 55–78.
- Miall, D. S. 1989. The Displacement of Emotions: the Case of 'Frost at Midnight'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 20: 97–102.
- Miall, D. S. & D. Kuiken. In Press. What is literariness? Three components of literary reading. *Discourse Processes*.
- Mukarovský, J. 1964. Standard Language and Poetic Language. In *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, P. L. Garvin, (ed.). Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.
- O'Grady, W. & M. Dobrovolsky. 1989. *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*. New York NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Pinker, S. & Birdsong D. 1979. Speakers' Sensitivity to Rules of Frozen Word Order. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 18: 497–508.
- Plug, J. 1993. The Rhetoric of Secrecy: Figures of the Self in 'Frost at Midnight'. In *Coleridge's Visionary Languages*, T. Fulford & M. D. Paley (eds.). Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer.
- Purves, A. C. 1962. Formal Structure in 'Kubla Khan'. In *Studies in Romanticism* 1: 187–191.
- Sharp, R. A. 1985. The Structure of Coleridge's Nature Poetry. *Papers on Language & Literature* 21: 28–42.
- Steiner, G. 1972. In a Post-Culture. *Extraterritorial: Papers on Language and Literature*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Stillinger, J. 1994. *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems*. Oxford: OUP.
- Tsur, R. 1987. *The Road to Kubla Khan: A Cognitive Approach*. Jerusalem: Israel Science.
- Tsur, R. 1992. *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive? The Poetic Mode of Speech Perception*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- van Peer, W. 1997. Two Laws of Literary History: Growth and Predictability in Canon Formation. *Mosaic* 30: 113–132.
- Wheeler, K. M. 1981. *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* London: Heinemann.
- Wu, D. (ed.). 1994. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Yarlott, G. 1967. *Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid*. London: Methuen.
- Zöllner, K. 1990. 'Quotation analysis' as a means of understanding comprehension processes of longer and more difficult texts. *Poetics* 19: 293–322.