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The Negative Sublime in Coleridge's Later Poetry; The Irreducibility of Difference

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Abstract

The poetic persona cannot form “a fair luminous light” embracing the Earth, that is, he cannot activate his creative energy. In Coleridge's other poems what triggers this energy is Joy and then the mystical power of nature. In this poem his imagination is imprisoned in his consciousness as he cannot feel Joy and the mystical power of nature cannot reconcile the binary oppositions. In his earlier poems nature was a book waiting to be deciphered and Coleridge could read the symbolic language of nature, whereas now, in the absence of Joy, this language is no more accessible to Coleridge and he thematizes the anxiety of this impasse in the poem. As a result, he cannot read the symbols that would make nature into Nature. In other words, he can perceive nature only as empirical reality and cannot perceive what lies beyond or within. This impasse is at the same time a re-formation of the rupture between subject and object that he managed to annihilate in his earlier poems.

Key Words: Coleridge, Negative Sublime, Poetry.

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In 1928, inspired by the subtitle of Coleridge's poem "The Nightingale A Conversational Poem," McLean Harper grouped Coleridge's autobiographical poems written between 1794 and 1799 as conversational poems. These poems started the tradition of the "great Romantic lyric" in English context and poeticised the poetic persona's transposition from the vision to the visionary, from the familiar temporality and space to an unfamiliar psychic realm amidst fluidity of conceptual boundaries. This transposition was called the Romantic sublime which offered a new ontology of matter and spirit. At the end of these poems the poetic persona comes back to the familiar world of everyday life with a transformed sensibility. In these poems, the body becomes the locus of aesthetic experience. Due to the corporeal effects of the empirical reality and the transcendence of it in the aftermath of an indulgence in a mystical process, it is possible to say that the poetic persona's experience is based on a combination of Hartleyan Associationism and Neo-Platonism. Accordingly, when defining Coleridge's interaction with nature, some critics use the term Neo-Platonic Spinozist, a term which lays bare his mystical experience of empirical nature. His is also an attempt to rehabilitate the lost sense of unity of man with nature, an attempt to bring together bodily materialism and visionary perception. However, after the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* and after he read German Romantics, Coleridge departed from his previous philosophical position which was largely shaped by the Enlightenment philosophers like Hartley and Berkeley. This departure meant also a change in his previous ways of relating to nature. In this period, Coleridge could not achieve the transition from the vision into the visionary in his poems and this failure was called the negative sublime in Hegelian terms. This paper aims to offer a contrastive analysis of one of his later poems, "Dejection: An Ode," in which he cannot achieve the previous experience of the sublime, and in which he feels stuck in the corporeal level and thematizes this failure. This poem is, paradoxically, more telling about the experience of the sublime as he reflects on why he cannot achieve this transition and the resulting sense of frustration caused by this failure.

Coleridge's poems can be grouped in different ways. One efficient criterion to group them might be to look at whether he can achieve the experience of the sublime in them. We see that the most outstanding feature of his conversational poems ("Religious Musings," "France: An Ode," "Eolian Harp," "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison," "Fears in Solitude," "Frost at Midnight" and "Dejection: An Ode") and of the poems of high imagination ("Kubla Khan," "Christabel," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner") is his ability to achieve the transition from the vision to the visionary or yearning for such a transcendence. In these poems the poet experiences the ecstatic joy of achieving the visionary experience while in his later poems he feels stuck in the vision part of the experience and is steeped into the anxiety resulting from his inability to achieve the visionary.

Another way of grouping Coleridge's poems might be to look at his philosophical evolution. While he was writing his best poems, he was under the influence of the progressive Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Hartley. However, he did not feel at home in the empirical attitude in these philosophers and tried to combine their mode of thinking with Neo-Platonism. After the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, he went to Germany and there he learned German and read Kant and the other German philosophers like Schelling and Schlegel brothers. His exposition to German philosophy marks the beginning of his conservative phase in which he moves further away from empiricist philosophers of English tradition. In this phase he cannot write good poetry and concentrates more on prose. In the poems he wrote in this period, he thematizes his frustration born out of his inability to achieve the sublime.

In his analysis of Coleridge's poetry, Steven Bygrave says, "[i]n Coleridge and others there is frequently an assertion of 'overplus' or residue which by its nature (or rather by its not being nature) can be accommodated only with difficulty even to a system –language-.... The 'overplus' is something unsayable- even,... something unspeakable" (61). This unsayable, the residue of the sayable is the sublime. Bygrave also talks about Hegelian idea of the negative sublime, which is "the individual's recognition of intellectual incapacity before a divinity which reveals itself not as 'mind' but overwhelmingly as 'nature'..." (60). The negative sublime is what we see when Coleridge makes abortive attempts to experience the sublime. "Dejection: An Ode" is a good example of the negative sublime as in this poem Coleridge yearns for his previous experience of the sublime but he cannot achieve it anymore. Therefore, one can say that the poem is based on the failure to achieve the sublime rather than on the sublime itself.

When Coleridge was at university, there was an increasing interest in Platonism and Greek writers. According to Abrams, this interest is one of the important factors that determined the course of things in English Romanticism. Therefore, Abrams says that Neo-Platonism is very important in understanding English Romanticism (1971: 169-170). There are parallelisms between Coleridge's experience of transposition from the vision into the visionary in his poems and Platonic Doctrine of Recollection. Plato puts the emphasis on the intellectual dimension of this process and, for him, the individual remembers what he has forgotten in reincarnation. However, Coleridge puts the emphasis on the imaginative dimension triggered in this process. Thus, he departs from the idea of recollection of what the soul already knows. According to some critics like Cunliffe, Coleridge did not use this Platonic idea exactly but it became just a metaphor or an idiom to give expression to "how the mind's latent faculties are awakened or elicited by and through experience." As stated above, Plato is mainly concerned with knowledge in his Doctrine of Recollection. However, in Coleridge's case rather than the knowledge, this doctrine;

becomes emotionally and imaginatively charged. Coleridge is not talking about the recovery of some objective content of knowledge but about the recovery of the senses themselves from 'alienation'. Recollection or 'recovery' becomes a process which restores the mind to its original and true nature. Coleridge sees the 'awakening' or 'exciting' of this process as one of the principal functions of both poetry and philosophy (Cunliffe, 212-213).

When Coleridge started writing poetry, the literary and artistic worlds were dominated by the Burkean understanding of the sublime. Burke, the first theorist of the sublime in British context, suggested that the sublime is

a void, an abyss or ecstasy one experiences in the face of the object of the sublime, and any natural phenomena that lead into an impression of infinity have the potential for the experience of the sublime. Such phenomena inspire pain and terror or delightful horror in the viewer... According to Burke, the sublime astonishes the reason so his sublime is sensationalist, and it relies on the power in objects that transmits itself through the senses to a passive mind. (Birlik and Dirmit, 294)

By locating the sublime in the body, Burke makes it a corporeal experience which is mostly shaped by the changes in the central nerve system; that is, Burkean sublime is a chain of psycho-physiological events which force the limits of cognitive/ psychic unity:

In the Burkean sublime which is neural in essence, the terror or the amazement produced by the sublime is beyond our control, the beholder loses the control of the perceived sense of one's integrated body, which leads into a kind of cognitive collapse, losing the beholder's egotistical boundaries. To put all in a nutshell, Burke bases his aesthetic categories concerning the sublime on a bodily experience of pain and pleasure and the annihilation of the self in this experience. (Birlik and Dirmit, 294).

Burkean understanding of the sublime is part of an aesthetics which is profoundly shaped by the empiricist associationist psychology of Hartley, who claims that the mind is corporeal and it experiences the same pleasure in the active exercise of its own capacities as does the body. For Hartley,

The best works are those which most disturb our normal trains of association and force the mind into the creative construction of new associative connections.... it is the *disruptive* effect of new associations which makes art interesting, precisely because it rouses the mind to a more intense state of activity in the attempt to organise the associations which are generated by novelty. Similarly, the sublime is effective because it demands that the mind try to match itself with 'great

objects' and in doing so creates new experiences 'by the exercise they give to our faculties'. This muscular associationism assumes that judgements of taste are, by and large, transpositions of bodily experience to intellectual activity, and that when our intellectual capacities are put to 'moderate exercise' they give us a pleasure which cannot be produced by the indolence of passive association nor the pain of more demanding intellectual effort (Craig, 23) .

The first part of Craig's statements on associationism reminds us of Wordsworthian idea of "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and how Wordsworth poeticizes his trains of association in his poems. In the second part of his statements, we are compelled to concentrate on the expression, "transposition of bodily experience to intellectual activity," which means aestheticizing what the poet experiences at the corporeal level. As the poet transgresses the corporeality of perception and moves towards an aesthetic production, this experience can also be called "sublimation" in Freudian terms. Regardless of one's perspective to view this transgression, at the core of it there is the co-existence of the corporeal and transgression of it in a psychic/aesthetic "beyond."

The sublime in Wordsworth and Coleridge differs from Burkean understanding as "Burke insists that power is the foremost, and so the experience of being overwhelmed by nature is for many synonymous with religious awe, in which we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him" (Jarvis, 179). Coleridge and Wordsworth radically transformed the Burkean sublime by insisting that the experience of infinite power is attended, not by fear and trembling, but rather by a deep awe and a profound joy. Both of them were exposed to Hartleyan philosophy which was empiricist in spirit at university. They were also influenced by Neo-Platonism. Therefore, in the poems in which they experience the sublime, Coleridge and Wordsworth shift from "objective nature, which symbolizes the spiritual and evokes the poet's creativity, to the soul of the poet himself, recognizing that a certain condition of the soul, or a certain power, must pre-exist before the individual is capable of responding to nature as a symbol of anything" (Cornwell, 80). Therefore, Coleridgean sublime is charged with mystical elements and involves the intersection of the outer and the inner material. He combines these seemingly contradictory modes of thinking in his poetic practice. They are contradictory as Hartleyan philosophy concentrates on the empirical facts disregarding the transcendental elements and Neo-Platonism seeks the source of truth not in this world but in a transcendental realm.

Imagination in Coleridge's poems is something like the creative unconscious, it is "the faculty for unifying subject and object, the perceiver and the perceived" and it "makes possible the moment in which one is unified with the 'Supreme Reality'" (Cornwell, 74) . Imagination is activated by Joy. He starts with the experience of the picturesque and moves beyond the corporeality of it, or he moves from the neurological and psychological impacts of

the picturesque towards the experience of the sublime. He transcends his empirical experience and this moment of transcendence is his contact with the supreme reality. This is his transition from the vision to the visionary, which is of mystical nature. A short quotation from his poem “Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouny” might illustrate how he poeticizes his experience of the sublime and his transition from the corporeal to the visionary. The thrill he experiences because of the magnificence of the Mont Blanc leads him to the moment of the sublime:

But when I look again,
It is thine own calm home, thy crystal shrine,
Thy habitation from eternity!
O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee,
Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,
Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer
I worshipped the Invisible alone. (10-16)

Here “I” of the viewer or the subjectivity of this viewer assumes the centre stage of the poem. Representation of nature reflects the psychic motions of the poet. However, this should not mislead the readers as physical/empirical nature and psychic motions of the poet are represented in the initial lines of the poems only to be transcended.

He deciphers the symbolic language of nature to have contact with the Supreme Reality and to experience ecstatic joy. The poem thematizes the relieving sense of Oneness achieved with Nature thus with Supreme Reality. He says that the natural phenomena he sees around are a reflection of the Supreme Reality:

Yet, like some sweet beguiling melody,
So sweet, we know not we are listening to it,
Thou, the meanwhile, wast blending with my Thought,
Yea, with my Life and Life’s own secret joy:
Till the dilating Soul, enrapt, transfused,
Into the mighty vision passing—there

As in her natural form, swelled vast to Heaven. (17-23)

He calls what he experiences “secret ecstasy” and addresses both his heart and nature to join his Hymn:

Awake, my soul! not only passive praise

Thou owest! not alone these swelling tears,

Mute thanks and secret ecstasy! Awake,

Voice of sweet song! Awake, my heart, awake!

Green vales and icy cliffs, all join my Hymn. (24-28)

At the end of the poem, he experiences an overwhelming sense of ecstasy and Oneness with nature. He views the “stupendous Mountain” “...upward from [its] base/ Slow travelling with dim eyes suffused with tears.” It seems to be “a cloud of incense from the Earth!”. It is now a “kingly Spirit throned among the hills,” and the “dread ambassador from Earth to Heaven,/ Great Hierarch!”. The mountain with its magnificence becomes the connecting element between the poetic persona, nature, and the Supreme Reality. It communicates the feelings of the poetic persona to the “silent sky”:

Thou too, hoar Mount! with thy sky-pointing peaks,

Oft from whose feet the avalanche, unheard,

Shoots downward, glittering through the pure serene

Into the depth of clouds, that veil thy breast—

Thou too again, stupendous Mountain! ... (70-74)

Coleridge published “Dejection” on the day Wordsworth got married and on the seventh anniversary of his own marriage with Sarah Fricker. It was written long after his conversational poems, but it is grouped among them as it was written in a conversational mode and as it contained a lot of autobiographical material (Jones 116). The poem was originally based on a verse letter (which was 100 lines longer than the poem) written to Sarah Hutchinson, who was a lifelong obsession for Coleridge. The letter was full of intimate and passionate expressions and, for understandable reasons, in the poem he avoids such expressions, which changed the whole tone of the poem. In its published form the poem gives

the impression that it was written for an ambiguous woman and it seems to focus on his own frustrated and disillusioned feelings originating from the loss of his imaginative power. It seems to be about his analysis of himself, his misery, and the disconnection of the link between his mind and nature. Interestingly enough, this poem is more revealing about his imaginative power and how he writes poetry in conversational poems. Therefore, one can say that the poem is about the process of writing poetry or it thematizes the poetry writing processes. Parker thinks that the poem “*dramatizes* an emotional crisis; it does not simply record, from Coleridge’s life, an about-face in psychological speculation.... That he can apprehend the phenomena of Nature’s dower without Joy only testifies to the depth of his crisis” (192).

In this poem, too, we see one of Coleridge’s recurrent themes in conversational poems; that is, the correlation between the poetic persona’s reaction to nature and his ability to find the necessary inspiration to write poetry. He tries to remember how his imaginative power used to work throughout the poem; in fact, this process makes up the whole poem. He lapses into anxiety and poeticizes this process: “The poet’s present state of spiritual desolation forces him to externalise this state of being, to present it as an object in itself desirable and whose loss is to be lamented. Yet the very act of mourning this lost creative power compels the poet to recollect it, an act of recall which is also a reproduction, however fleeting, of his former ‘state of Being’” (Cunliffe 211). However, in this poem, unlike in his other poems, the poetic persona seems to be dismissed from a harmonious universe.

In the early lines of the poem, Coleridge gives a very detailed depiction of his immediate surroundings, thus, he leads the reader to the experience of the picturesque:

For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light,
(With swimming phantom light o’erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast! (9-16)

However, such a natural setting does not enable him to achieve the sublime as he cannot go beyond the empirical reality recorded by his eyes. He expects that “[t]hose sounds which oft have raised [him], whilst they awed,/ And sent [his] soul abroad” might do the same thing again. The wind’s ability to send “his soul abroad,” might be interpreted as the Neo-Platonic process of going beyond the empirical reality: “Might now perhaps their wonted

impulse give,” and “Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!” However, he is confronted with a spiritual crisis as he cannot trigger an interaction between mystical resources in his mind and in nature.

Rather than being a passive recipient, the poetic persona wants to be actively involved in his interaction with nature. He is aware of the fact that he should make effort to receive something from nature. For him, to be able to react to nature and to feel the visionary dimension in it, one should get involved in a symbolic act of “reading nature.” However, he is also aware that “this is a vain endeavour” in his case:

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze forever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within. (39-46)

By saying “foundations are within,” he accepts that for an interaction between his mind and nature to occur, there should be a mystical power in both his mind and nature. Giving a hearing to Holmes’ words at this point might shed more light on Coleridge’s impasse: the ‘fountain’ imagery “connects directly with the previous passages, describing the mystical quality of truth; and the experience of being lost and outcast, buried and isolated under one’s own grief” (55). The following lines too testify to the idea that the triggering force for this interaction is located in the consciousness of the poetic persona:

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth -
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element! (53-58)

He also says “We receive but what we give.” In such expressions, as Bloom and Thrilling say, “the issue is to locate the experience of divine love ‘in the human viewer and not in the external scene’” (qtd in Reid 65). Parker takes this line as a challenge to the Lockean empirical philosophy (93).

The poetic persona experiences Love; however, Joy, which will give him the imaginative power to write poetry, which will lead to an interaction with nature and which is also the result of this interaction, remains beyond his grasp. By triggering and activating imagination, Joy acts as a medium between the individual and the object of the sublime. Imagination is the power or skill that links the subject to the object, the perceiver to the perceived. Joy is the only thing that can lead him out of this imaginative impasse as in his other poems. According to Bloom, the poem offers “a set of assumptions that include the opposing Wordsworthian and Coleridgean views to the relationship between external nature and the poet’s creative joy” (21). For Bloom, Joy is Imagination itself, “the Great I Am, the word of primeval creation, issues forth as a light, a glory, a fair, luminous cloud, an ultimate voice which is the strong music of the soul” (23). Holmes too elaborates on the troubled relation between the poet and nature and relates it to absence of Joy:

For Coleridge the relationship between mind and nature is, at its deepest, a mystical one which could only be expressed in imaginative or symbolic terms. There is a transcendent or divine element within nature which finds a living response within the heart of every man, whatever his formal belief or unbelief. Mind and nature answer each other, and in that continuous living interchange, usually below the threshold of consciousness, is born what Coleridge called ‘joy’. In the poet or artist, and pre-eminently in men like Shakespeare or Wordsworth, that interchange is made conscious and creative. But all men share in it. To lose such a consciousness, after having once experienced it- as Coleridge describes in ‘Dejection’- was a crisis of spiritual significance in which the very ‘ground of being’ was challenged. (54-55)

In the absence of Joy and interaction between the soul and nature, what the poetic persona experiences is both a visionary and a linguistic / poetic crisis. He cannot achieve the higher consciousness which is to take place in the aftermath of the transition from the vision to the visionary as in his other conversational poems. As in the below given lines, Coleridge, who says that Joy belongs to “pure of heart,” remains imprisoned in his solipsism:

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.

Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
 Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
 Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
 Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
 Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower,
 A new Earth and new Heaven,
 Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud -
 Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud -
 We in ourselves rejoice!
 And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
 All melodies the echoes of that voice,
 All colours a suffusion from that light. (59-75)

He can no longer activate Joy which will lead him to the Supreme Reality and to read the symbols in nature. In other words, nature which is the second book of God, in Neo-Platonic terms, remains a closed book in the poem. He juxtaposes his previous union with nature and his living present in a nostalgic mood:

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
 This joy within me dallied with distress,
 And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
 Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
 For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
 And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
 But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
 Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
 But oh! each visitation
 Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,
 My shaping spirit of Imagination.
 For not to think of what I needs must feel,
 But to be still and patient, all I can;
 And haply by abstruse research to steal
 From my own nature all the natural man -
 This was my sole resource, my only plan:
 Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
 And now is almost grown the habit of my soul. (76-93)

In his feelings too, we observe passive not active elements as in the case of “grief without pang” or “A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief.” These feelings remain in his solipsistic world without finding a “natural outlet” and relief “[i]n word, or sigh, or tear-“:

All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze -and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue; (27-36)

He is hopeless, and remains as a passive recipient of his immediate surroundings. He gazes at his immediate surroundings “with how blank an eye!” and says, “I see them all so excellently fair,/ I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!” His seeing but not feeling the beauty of natural phenomena is another reference to his inability to make nature into Nature.

As a result, the wind cannot do what it does in his other conversation poems because the creative interaction between the wind and the lyre, which is a metaphor for the poet, is disrupted and the wind cannot produce harmonious sounds on the lyre. In fact, the sound of the wind is far from being harmonious, its sound is “worse than wintry.” These lines present the wind “as a bad actor, overplaying, or a worse poet, raving bombast. The Eolian Harp is not the fit instrument for this Wind, as the harp is needlessly subtle, in itself too bare of easily negative associations” (Bloom 22). Abrams’ comments on the wind command respect as he relates it to the poet himself: “the wind is not only a property of the landscape, but also a vehicle for radical changes in the poet’s mind. The rising wind, usually linked with the outer transition from winter to spring, is correlated with a complex subjective process: the return to the sense of community after isolation, the renewal of life, and emotional vigour after apathy and a deathlike torpor, and an outburst of creative power following a period of imaginative sterility” (1984: 26). The wind has wider connotations in political terms too:

The wind, as an invisible power known only by its effects, had an even greater part to play than water, light and clouds in the Romantic revolt against the world-view of the Enlightenment. In addition, the moving air lent itself pre-eminently to the aim of tying man back into the environment from which, Wordsworth and Coleridge felt, he had been divorced by post-

Cartesian dualism and mechanism.... the Romantic wind is typically a wild wind and a free one...which, even when gentle, holds the threat of destructive violence. (Abrams 1984: 42)

The wind in Romantic context has other positive connotations which are missing in this poem: on the one hand, it is “the most eligible model for Romantic activism, as well as an emblem of the free Romantic spirit,” on the other hand, “in an era obsessed with the fact and idea of revolution” it is associated with “a purifying revolutionary violence which destroys in order to preserve” (Abrams 1984: 43). In the poem we see neither a reference to this Romantic activism nor a purifying revolutionary violence. The wind becomes an empty signifier which can only refer to a poetic/spiritual impasse:

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality's dark dream!
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream
Of agony by torture lengthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,
Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
Thou actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
Thou mighty poet, e'en to frenzy bold!
What tell'st thou now about? (94-110)

Like the wind, the lyre has negative connotations, too. The wind cannot work “Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute, /Which better far were mute.” If we take the lute as a metaphor for the poet, these lines refer to the lack of previous harmonious interaction between the poet and nature. The wind for him raves “unnoticed” and gives out “a scream/ Of agony by torture lengthened out.”

He is worried that Sarah is sick somewhere away from him. He feels devastated as he cannot help her. The poem ends with good wishes for his friend. He wishes that the wind which brought destruction and misery to him would bring “wings of healing” to his friend who could capture the lost but longed for sense of relief and could experience Joy lifted in

spirit. The poetic persona is wide awake all through the night but he wishes that his friend could wake up with Joy spiritually enhanced:

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,
Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
With light heart may she rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayst thou ever, evermore rejoice. (26-139)

“Dejection” is striking in imaginative terms because Coleridge cannot disconnect himself from Sarah whose happiness he values so much. Although he is away from her, he still feels united with her spiritually. According to Reid, this poem has such an ending because:

The poem declares the poet’s hopeless love, explains that this is the cause of spiritual disability which prevents all joy and response to Nature, and ends with a noble prayer for the well-being of the beloved. But in a sense the poem does not end, for the final stanza is just as discrete as any other, and does not grow out of the preceding narrative. It is, rather, an opportunity to impose an ending on the poem, and if it repeats the pattern of the earlier poems (in producing a vision of Nature as seen by another) it does so antithetically, since nothing has changed since the persona’s earlier declaration on the forms of Nature. (69)

For Bloom and Abrams, the ending of the poem reflects the loss of his imaginative power. Bloom comments on the main theme of the poem as follows: the ending of the poem supports the idea that, the poem “overtly rejects the dialectic of Wordsworth’s memory-as-salvation. The logic of ‘Dejection’ is that human process is irreversible; imaginative loss is permanent, and nature intimates to us our own mortality always” (19). Abrams says that “the poet’s spirit awakens to violent life even as he laments his inner death, achieves release in the

despair at being cut off from all outlet, and demonstrates the power of imagination in the process of memorializing its failure” (1984: 27).

Abrams thinks that Coleridge’s inability of recollection in his consciousness reminds one of Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: “The poetic meditation is set in April, which turns out, as in Eliot’s Waste Land, to be the cruellest month because, in breeding life out of the dead land, it painfully revives emotional life in the observer mixing memory and desire” (1984: 26). One feels compelled to elaborate more on this parallelism. It is interesting because in Eliot’s poem the poetic persona is familiar with the traditional connotations of April in the communal and personal memory. In addition, he suffers the results of this awareness because what he sees in his immediate surroundings is a Life-in-Death situation. In this context April is the cruellest month because the roots rather than sprouting into the surface prefer to remain where they are, that is, they prefer this Life-in-Death situation. In their case, desire and memory conflict with their situation in the living present. They desire to sprout but now their physical, spiritual and sexual potency originating from the vital energy is missing. Thus, they are devastated in conflicting feelings resulting from the habitual practice of sprouting and their present impotence. In Eliot’s case this overwhelming sense of impotence and waste land are a reflection of the exhaustion and meaninglessness of the dry and mechanical modern Western culture. In other words, when Eliot depicts the waste land, in fact, he depicts modern culture. However in Coleridge’s case, what he sees in his immediate surroundings is a correlative of imaginative exhaustion, a reflection of his imaginative and creative sterility or dryness in the absence of Joy; that is, his creative power. In his case there is a conflict between his desire and memory and his poetic impotence. As in the past, he expects nature to inspire him and to trigger his imagination but he lacks the substantial element for this, that is, the Joy that should come from within which is, in Eliot’s case the vital energy. As he did in the past Coleridge cannot enjoy the transcendental truth lying behind the visible phenomena. He is imprisoned in his solipsism and can never get out of the prison-house of his self. He ends the poem in his solipsism.

By way of conclusion, the poetic persona cannot form “a fair luminous light” embracing the Earth, that is, he cannot activate his creative energy. In his other poems what triggers this energy is Joy and then the mystical power of nature. In this poem his imagination is imprisoned in his consciousness as he cannot feel Joy and the mystical power of nature cannot reconcile the binary oppositions. In his earlier poems nature was a book waiting to be deciphered and Coleridge could read the symbolic language of nature, whereas now, in the absence of Joy, this language is no more accessible to Coleridge and he thematizes the anxiety of this impasse in the poem. As a result, he cannot read the symbols that would make nature into Nature. In other words, he can perceive nature only as empirical reality and cannot perceive what lies beyond or within. This impasse is at the same time a re-formation of the rupture between subject and object that he managed to annihilate in his earlier poems.

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