

‘THIS LIME-TREE BOWER MY PRISON’: COLERIDGE’S SCIENTIFIC VIEW OF LIFE IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH THELWALL

WAKA ISHIKURA

In 1796, after ceasing publication of *The Watchman*, Coleridge, as a young radical, still brooded over the failed ideal of Pantisocracy, unsettled by the conflict between revolutionary values and the threat of French invasion. From this time until the beginning of 1797, the *annus mirabilis* of his poetic flowering, spent in part with Wordsworth in Nether Stowey, Coleridge seems to have had little interest in philosophical concerns, although he started to be recognised as a poet following the publication of *Poems on Various Subjects*. In this period, Coleridge began corresponding with John Thelwall, writing that ‘Pursuing the same end by the same means we ought not to be strangers to each other’ (CL 1:204). A considerable number of letters from Coleridge to Thelwall has survived. These are notable for containing bombastic and humorous expressions, which might be termed, using Coleridge’s own phrase in reference to Plato, ‘gorgeous Nonsense’ (CL 1:295). Although for unknown reasons few of Thelwall’s letters to Coleridge are now extant,¹ Thelwall appears to have been an enthusiastic correspondent with Coleridge, while probably assessing the extent of ‘citizen’ Coleridge’s sincerity and support, under the social pressure of conservative influences. In these letters, Coleridge shows a keen interest in Thelwall’s ‘An Essay, towards the Definition of Animal Vitality’, which was published in 1793. There is no specific prose record of Coleridge’s opinion about Thelwall’s essay, but it is clear that in order to understand Coleridge’s assessment of it, we need to consider the fact that the founders of the radical science of the age, such as David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, had fundamentally influenced Coleridge’s view on life and science in general. It is also important to note that Coleridge had developed a philosophical interest in unifying various sciences; for him, scientific concerns included all forms of knowledge, from theology to more practical subjects. In this essay, I will argue that Coleridge’s criticism of Thelwall’s view on ‘animal vitality’ can be found in ‘This Lime Tree Bower My Prison’, the main theme of which is the life of friendship, itself a poetic theme created for Thelwall. By examining these points I hope to shed new light on Coleridge’s thoughts about science in the early part of his career, and to show that ‘This Lime Tree Bower My Prison’ was part of his conversation with Thelwall.

After ceasing publication of *The Watchman* after ten issues, Coleridge devised several projects in order to secure a stable income for himself: for example, he considered founding a school for young people, possibly in an

industrial city, becoming a dissenting minister, or else working in journalism.² Although he only became a journalist at the end of 1799, as a lead writer for the *Morning Post*, his earlier account of a plan to establish a school for young people suggests the ways in which his various philosophical interests were intertwined. Coleridge claimed that in order to have enough knowledge to fulfil the purpose of the school, he needed to study ‘Chemistry & Anatomy’ in Germany, and proposed ‘to perfect them [eight young men] in the following studies’ (CL 1:209). His perspective on these studies is presented as follows:

- I. Man as Animal: including the complete knowledge of Anatomy, Chemistry, Mechanics & Optics. —
2. Man as an *Intellectual* Being: including the ancient Metaphysics, the systems of Locke & Hartley, —of the Scotch Philosophers—& the new Kantian S[ystem]—
3. Man as a Religious Being: including an historic summary of all Religions & the arguments for and against Natural & Revealed Religion. Then proceeding from the individual to the aggregate of Individuals & disregarding all chronology except that of mind I should perfect them 1. in the History of Savage Tribes. 2. of semi-barbarous nations. 3 of nations emerging from semi-barbarism. 4. of civilized states. 5 of luxurious states. 6 of revolutionary states. —7. —of Colonies. —During these studies I should intermix the knowledge of languages and instruct my scholars in Belles Lettres & the principles of composition. (CL 1:209)

Here, we can notice that Coleridge’s unified view of science includes, firstly, the practical application of the latest scientific knowledge to the understanding of the human being, secondly, science of the mind, and lastly science of God. These are organised in turn into the following three areas of study: ‘Man as Animal’, which covers studies dealing with things on the basis of practical science, developing practical concepts so as to explain how organisms work; ‘Man as an Intellectual Being’, which includes a wide variety of philosophical ideas, especially the latest systems of thought ranging from Hartley to Kant, in order to form a basic study of the human mind that could contribute to the understanding of all human history, from the age of savage tribes to the contemporary civilised state, presumably ending with the creation of the modern distinction between colonisers and colonised; and ‘Man as a Religious Being’, which is considered the focal point of all studies, dealing with the relation of the individual mind to God or gods from a historical perspective, so that on this basis, historical studies could be developed as a study of ‘the aggregate of Individuals’. This passage contains one of Coleridge’s earliest references to Kant. Moreover, it is also noteworthy in that it clearly shows Coleridge’s keen awareness of the necessity of refurbishing systems of thought

by combining the latest knowledge and sciences with religion. This concern seems to have later evolved not only into his thoughts about the scientific systems capable of being applied to the editing of an encyclopedia, but also his pursuit of the principles of method for all human understanding.³

Coleridge published his first volume of poems, entitled *Poems on Various Subjects*, in April 1796. This volume of poems received several reviews, some of which were critical of Coleridge's rather rough versification, double-epithets, and obscurity of expression, while others recognised the beauty of his work (Jackson, *Critical Heritage* 34–41). Coleridge himself considered the contents of the volume as 'buds of hope, and promises of better works to come' (CL 1:6), at least to the extent that he as a poet gained public recognition. While not succeeding in establishing a school for young people, Coleridge as a poet had no definite future designs, although still privately preserved his dream of establishing a Pantisocracy. It was at this time that John Thelwall entered Coleridge's circle of friends.

Thelwall, one of the radical figures of the age, was chiefly famous for his oratorical skills. He had also published some volumes of poetry, along with various pamphlets on politics and other subjects. He had been jailed in the Tower of London on a charge of high treason. Soon after the publication of *Poems on Various Subjects*, Coleridge wrote to Thelwall, implying his sympathy with the radical figure, stating that as 'A Necessitarian, I cannot possibly disesteem a man for his religious or anti-religious Opinions' (CL 1:205), and enclosing his volume of poems. After this, the two men began to correspond frequently. Among Thelwall's works, there was an essay entitled 'Towards A Definition of Animal Vitality', which caught Coleridge's attention. In one of his letters to Thelwall, he wrote, '. . . of your works I have now all, except your essay on animal vitality which I never had . . .' (CL 1:258). In the subsequent month, Coleridge began discussing the scientific explanation of life. He wrote:

Dr. Beddoes, & Dr Darwin think that *Life* is utterly inexplicable, writing as Materialists—You, I understand, have adopted the idea that it is the result of organized matter acted on by external Stimuli.—As likely as any other system; but you *assume* the thing to be proved—the '*capability* of being stimulated into sensation' as a *property* of organized matter—now 'the Capab.' &c is *my* definition of *animal Life*. (Written on 31 Dec. 1796; CL 1:294)

Coleridge continues, quoting from 'The Eolian Harp', the lines starting with 'And what if all of animated Nature/ Be but organic harps diversely fram'd', and mentions the topics of anatomy and vital phenomena and the question of the existence of souls, asking again for Thelwall's essay on 'Animal Vitality' (CL 1:294–95).⁴ Although in this letter Coleridge lists physicians and

metaphysicians who developed ideas of life, from the contemporary John Hunter to Plato, at this moment he seemed however not to be fully ready to explain the scientific meaning of life, only temporarily paying attention to the term ‘capability’. It might have been a great challenge for Coleridge to contemplate how this ‘capability’ could be explained, for example, the capability for scientific elucidation of the way in which the organs of the human body as a whole give rise to consciousness.

In Coleridge’s correspondence with Thelwall, scientific discussions had come to develop political implications and involve religious concerns. Generally speaking, Hartley’s theory of perception and Priestley’s materialism might have been the basic points from which various arguments arose,⁵ and the degree of a person’s commitment to a certain scientific view might have determined his or her political stance (Vickers 51–53). In his essay on ‘Animal Vitality’, the subtitle of which reads ‘Several of the Opinions of the Celebrated John Hunter are Examined and Controverted’, Thelwall argues that the vital principle of life can be explained from a materialist perspective, and examines the definition of life made by John Hunter. Thelwall writes that Hunter’s definition of life seems ‘particularly vague and unsatisfactory’, quoting Hunter’s statement that ‘*Life . . . does not consist in any modification of matter: it either is something superadded to matter, or else it consists in a peculiar arrangement of certain fine particles of matter*’ (Roe, *Politics of Nature* 115). He argues that ‘what is this *something that is not matter?* — Is it *Spirit?*’ (116), while explaining the meaning of ‘the term *Spirit*’ in terms of the distillation of ‘a fine and subtle, or aëriform essence’ (117).⁶ It follows that, according to Thelwall, ‘if we must needs make a distinct living existence of it [spirit], then can it possibly mean no other [*sic*] than a vital aëriform substance, diffused through the frame, and giving animation to the respective parts’ (117). As this ‘vital aëriform substance’ pervades the material world, according to Thelwall, what Hunter meant by the phrase ‘something superadded to matter’ ‘can only be a more refined species of matter added to that which is more gross’ (118). This is indicative of a materialistic understanding of the traditional concept of ‘aether’, which Thelwall applied to his understanding of ‘animal vitality’.

We need here to trace some of the earlier understanding of ‘aether’, in order to have a historical perspective on Thelwall’s argument. According to Hartley, perception occurs when the nerves vibrate through the medium of ‘Æther’, of which Newton writes: ‘its Particles are exceedingly smaller than those of Air, or even than those of Light’ (Newton, *Opticks* 352). Hartley draws on Newton when he formulates his materialistic hypothesis, and one of the most relevant arguments is found in Newton’s Question 23 in the last part of his *Opticks*: ‘Is not Vision perform’d chiefly by the Vibrations of this Medium [aether], excited in the bottom of the Eye by the Rays of Light, and propagated through the solid, pellucid and uniform Capillamenta of the optick Nerves in to the place of Sensation?’ (*Opticks* 353). Newton’s hypothetical question is focused on the

elucidation of the mechanism of perception in material terms, while Hartley's explanation, though based on Newton's argument, points to a reciprocal process in perception, or to the elastic nature of the human mind. Hartley writes:

We are to conceive, that when external objects are impressed on the sensory nerves, they excite vibrations in the aether residing in the pores of these nerves, by means of the mutual actions interceding between the objects, nerves, and aether. For there seem to be mutual actions of all the varieties between these three, in all the senses, though of a different nature in different senses. Thus it seems that light affects both the optic nerve and the aether; and also, that the affections of the aether are communicated to the optic nerve, and *vice versâ*. (Hartley 14)

Aether is a hypothetical substance that Newton considers in his *Principia*, 'a certain very subtle spirit pervading gross bodies and lying hidden in them' (*Principia* 943).⁷ According to Hartley, aether has the function of intermediating between external objects and nerves. Priestley developed Hartley's view on the function of aether to the extent that he saw that '[matter] consists of nothing but the powers of attraction and repulsion' (Priestley, *Works* 3:235); Priestley thus focuses on the opposing powers, suggestive of electricity, so as to replace matter with what had been attributed to the term 'aether'. Hartley's view on the reciprocal process of human perception parallels his understanding of the benevolence of God, which is the cause of the circles of love in people; 'aether' and love both mediate. And Priestley's view that matter is nothing but the powers of attraction and repulsion was sustained by his belief in that 'every thing is the *Divine power*' (Priestley, *Works* 3:241). The materialism of Hartley and Priestley, though different in many respects, is, in a sense, a materialism combined with religion. On the contrary, Thelwall removed all religious implications from his own argument, saying that he had formed his idea of life on 'the simple principles of materialism', 'without appealing to the fanciful creations of the visionary brain, or abstruse and unmeaning terms of pretended science' (Roe, *Politics of Nature* 105). It might be said that Thelwall tried to refute the Hartley-Priestley tradition of radical science by getting rid of religious presuppositions, which seemed somewhat ridiculous if treated as scientific claims. But it is also true that Thelwall himself was a philosopher who had speculated on what was said by other philosophers and doctors without having any first-hand experimental information and appropriate training concerning animal or human life.

For Coleridge, Christianity itself seemed to be at stake, and he began to see Thelwall as an atheist. In many of his letters to Thelwall, Coleridge continued to refute atheism, saying, for example, 'you [Thelwall] speak with *contempt* of two things, Old Age & the Christian Religion: --this Religion was believed by

Newton, Locke, & Hartley, after intense investigation, which in each had been preceded by unbelief' (*CL* 1:280). Thelwall, with his radicalism in politics and disbelief in religion, seemed to be a rather difficult figure for Coleridge to share his sense of fraternity with, while Coleridge's preaching about Christianity sometimes intensified into statements such as 'I write freely, Thelwall! for tho' *personally* unknown, I really love you, and can count but few human beings, whose hand I would welcome with a more hearty Grasp of Friendship', because 'Christianity regards morality as a process' (*CL* 1:282–83);⁸ thus, Coleridge desired that their friendship would be perfected in spite of the obstacles caused by Thelwall's atheistic views. Coleridge saw that human perception and understanding is not a mechanical process of shift and change, but an organic process of fulfilling oneness in the world, an understanding of which, as Berkeley claims, ensures that in God '*we live, and move, and have our being*' (124). Coleridge wrote, 'From the whole circle of Nature we collect Proofs that the Omnipotent operates in a process from the Slip to the full-blown Rose, from the embryo to the full-grown Man how vast & various the Changes!' (*Lectures 1795* 108–9). It is notable in this passage that the plant metaphor is assimilated with the growth of the human body and mind, which interestingly anticipates Wordsworth's line in a draft of the *Ruined Cottage*, dating from 1798: '[I]n all things/ He saw one life, & felt it was joy' (Wordsworth 177).

Coleridge's correspondence with Thelwall reveals his characteristic process of transforming and somewhat idealising a community of friends. At the end of the year 1796, the Coleridge family moved to Nether Stowey. Coleridge's pantisocratic dream transfigured itself in this small village, being supported by his friend and patron, Thomas Poole, and now developed in the realm of poetry, in one of the finest of his Conversation Poems, 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison'. The first draft of the poem known to exist is included in Coleridge's letter to Southey, dated 17 July 1797, and on the same day or on the previous day, Thelwall came to Nether Stowey (see *CL* 1:339n and Stanford 176). By the time that 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' was first published in the second volume of the *Annual Anthology* in 1800, with the subtitle, 'A POEM, / Addressed to CHARLES LAMB, of the India-House London', this poem had been revised extensively so as to include some of the finest descriptions of nature in his poetry. But the first draft of the poem can rather be seen as a kind of occasional verse addressed to his friends. In early July 1797, William and Dorothy Wordsworth visited Nether Stowey as they had just moved to Alfoxden, and Charles Lamb also visited there, meeting the Wordsworths, though the exact dates when they stayed with the Coleridges are uncertain. In the letter dated 17 July, Coleridge wrote to Southey, explaining the occasion on which the poem was written:

Charles Lamb has been with me for a week—he left me Friday morning. —/ The second day after Wordsworth came to me, dear

Sara accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which confined me during the whole time of C. Lamb's stay & still prevents me from all *walks* longer than a furlong. —While Wordsworth, his Sister, & C. Lamb were out one evening;/ sitting in the arbour of T. Poole's garden, which communicates with mine, I wrote these lines, with which I am pleased—

Well—they are gone: and here must I remain,
Lam'd by the scathe of fire, lonely & faint,
This lime-tree bower my prison. (CL 1:334)

It might be natural to Coleridge to send it first to Southey who was not there, as one of the themes of the poem is an imaginary reunion of friends.

The letter to Southey contains an account of the origin of the poem that has somehow determined the direction of critical investigation. First, as the passage quoted above shows, the poem is full of biographical elements, including various stories of Coleridge's friends, ranging from the tragedy involving Lamb's mother and sister, which is suggested by the phrase, 'strange calamity' (CL 1:335), to the commencement of Coleridge's collaboration with Wordsworth which gave birth to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Secondly, Coleridge cited the philosophical background of the poem in his note in the letter, saying 'You remember, I am a *Berkleian*' (CL 1:335). It is noteworthy that more than half a year before he wrote this phrase, Coleridge declared to Thelwall 'I am a *Berkleian*' (CL 1:278) to defend his use of the term 'soul' in his poems. Coleridge suggested that he used the term not because he believed that the soul 'existed previously to it's appearance in it's present body', and that he did not consider himself 'a Materialist'; he attributed his use of the term to his being 'a *Berkleian*' (CL 1:278). Though it seems unclear exactly what Coleridge meant by 'Berkleian', it is interesting to explore the relation between Coleridge's argument with Thelwall in terms of life and soul, and in relation to 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison'. This will shed new light on the poem, though it has already been the subject of critical studies of various kinds.⁹ As J.C.C. Mays points out, the poem is not only a public address to Charles Lamb, but also relates to Wordsworth, and possibly to Dorothy (PW 1:349–50). Nevertheless, it seems that the poem contains more layers of thought. It is worth examining the voice of Coleridge that addresses Thelwall in this poem, and I will argue that it was the argument of Coleridge with Thelwall that sustained the philosophical background of the lines to which Coleridge added the note, 'You remember, I am a *Berkleian*' (To Southey, CL 1:335).

As I have noted, around the time when Coleridge sent the first draft of the poem to Southey, Thelwall arrived in Nether Stowey. He came to the village in the hope of settling near Coleridge, writing a poem addressed to Coleridge, entitled 'Lines written at Bridgewater, in Somersetshire, on the 27th of July, 1797'.¹⁰ Coleridge made some efforts to find a residence for the Thelwalls. But

Nether Stowey, a peaceful village with beautiful scenery, had no room for a provocative figure like Thelwall. After Thelwall returned to Bristol, Coleridge wrote to him that if he would come again and try to settle in Nether Stowey, ‘I am afraid, that even riots & dangerous riots might be the consequence’, adding ‘come! but not yet!—come in two or three months—take lodgings at Bridgewater—familiarize the people to your name & appearance’, and suggesting that ‘when the *monstrosity* of the thing is gone off, & the people shall have begun to consider you, as a man whose mouth won’t eat them’, it might be possible for him to live there (*CL* 1:343–44). However, Thelwall gave up the idea of settling there, and Coleridge managed to avoid being involved in the uproar of the local people. Yet this does not mean that the poem had nothing to do with Thelwall. The first draft of the poem virtually awaited Thelwall’s arrival, and it can be considered that the poem, especially the first draft, was an answer to Thelwall on the topic of life, as the last lines suggest: ‘For you, my Sister & my Friends! to whom/ No sound is dissonant, which tells of Life!’ (*CL* 1:336).¹¹

This poem begins by expressing a sense of loss. The speaker imagines absent friends who are out there, while he is alone in the shelter of a lime tree, probably near a kitchen garden. Thelwall wrote a sonnet on his days in Newgate,¹² while Coleridge put the speaker in an imaginary confinement, calling the domestic place a prison. We can see here not only Coleridge’s sympathy with but also his detachment from the political radicalism of the age. The natural description in the first draft is rather less detailed and polished than in the final one. Instead, the narrative of the first draft moves straightforwardly from a dark sunken place to a wide view of the sinking sun, culminating in a eulogy of the light which it associates with ‘the Almighty Spirit’:

My friends, whom I may never meet again,
 On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
 Wander delighted, and look down, perchance,
 On that same rifted Dell, where many an Ash
 Twists it’s wild limbs beside the ferny rock,
 Whose plummy ferns for ever nod and drip
 Spray’d by the waterfall. But chiefly Thou,
 My gentle-hearted CHARLES! thou, who hast pin’d
 And hunger’d after Nature many a year
 In the great City pent, winning thy way,
 With sad yet bowed soul, thro’ evil & pain
 And strange calamity. —Ah slowly sink
 Behind the western ridge; thou glorious Sun!
 Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
 Ye purple Heath-flowers! Richlier burn, ye Clouds!
 Live in the yellow Light, ye distant Groves!

And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend
 Struck with joy's deepest calm, and gazing round
 On the wide view, may gaze till all doth seem
 Less gross than bodily, a living Thing
 That acts upon the mind, and with such hues
 As cloathe the Almighty Spirit, when he makes
 Spirits perceive His presence! (CL 1:335)

'[A] living Thing' in the context of Berkeley does not refer to any material substance *per se*, but any substance that is mediated by a spirit which is 'one simple, undivided, active being'; when a spirit 'perceives ideas, it is all the *understanding*, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the *will*' (Berkeley 85). According to Berkeley, the final cause of nature lies in God, and the spirit produces the mental activity, for example, of perceiving, of understanding, etc. Coleridge's emphasis in the poem is on the presence of God that the speaker imagines himself feeling through the prevailing light over the wide landscape. In this view of the natural world, 'No sound is dissonant, which tells of Life!', as all things that are perceived shall live in harmony with each other, having their final cause in God.

In the first draft of the poem, the speaker addresses 'My gentle-hearted CHARLES' as well as 'my Sister & my Friends'. In the lines quoted above, the friend who is 'Struck with joy's deepest calm' may be identical with 'My gentle-hearted CHARLES', and probably among those whom the speaker supposes 'I may never meet again'. The identities of these friends seem rather unstable, and it is possible that Thelwall was included among these imaginary friends. It is also possible to read the presence of Thelwall in the speaker's vision of all becoming alive, as this part of the poem points to the argument about what life is, or what animal vitality is. Thelwall concludes his essay on animal vitality as follows: 'I consider *the preliminary principles of life* to be a *specific organization* and a *specific stimulus*; the *perfect contact of these* to be the *immediate cause*, and *life itself* to be *the state of action produced by this union*' (Roe 118). Coleridge's answer in this poem is definitely 'no'. Coleridge might have considered in this way: '[A] specific organization' might be a human body, and 'a specific stimulus' might be light; but the union of these two will never produce life, otherwise we must have life without God. Coleridge needed to emphasise the point that the prevailing light-bearing deity acts on the human perception in order to avoid committing himself to the view that sees life as a mechanism without moral concerns. To Coleridge's eye, Thelwall seemed to suffer from a total lack of the science of God, in spite of his eloquent discourse on animal vitality with his shrewd understanding of the latest scientific discussions.

Charles Lamb, whom the poem publicly addresses, was indignant at Coleridge's treatment of him in this poem. As already noted, the poem can be

read as corresponding to ‘Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-tree’ by Wordsworth, which Lamb also admired. Lamb was therefore somewhat isolated from the poetic conversation between Coleridge and Wordsworth, although the speaker still continues to address ‘CHARLES’. When this poem was first published in 1800, Lamb wrote to Coleridge, saying ‘there is a something not unlike good poetry in that Page, if you had not run into the unintelligible abstraction-fit about the manner of the Deity’s making Spirits perceive his presence’ (Lamb, *Letters* 1:224). The friend who ‘may gaze till all doth seem/ Less gross than bodily’ can be read as referring to Lamb, but Lamb himself was not familiar with the import of these lines, so that he saw the passage as an ‘unintelligible abstraction-fit’. In his letter to Thelwall in October 1797, Coleridge quoted the lines from the poem as follows: “‘Struck with the deepest calm of Joy” I [Coleridge] stand /Silent, with swimming sense; and gazing round/ On the wide Landscape . . .’ (CL 1:349–50). This suggests that one who gazes around till all becomes ‘a living Thing’ can be anyone, if only in imagination, in principle not excluding Thelwall. Coleridge’s final text of ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ bears a multi-layered textuality in which the speaking voice is doubled or tripled with different poetical or philosophical contexts, modifying its tone in the enlargement of the description of natural scenery. In creating the text, the visual presence of ‘My gentle-hearted CHARLES’ seems to become less real than the biographical background suggests, to the extent that the perfection of idealism in the vision of friendship and nature almost entails a denial of the actual presence of the friend, Lamb. What Coleridge left out of the poem may be clarified by the following remarks made by Lamb:

I have been getting drunk two days running. I find my moral sense in the last stage of a consumption, my religion burning as blue and faint as the tops of evening bricks. Hell gapes, and the Devils great guts cry ‘cupboard’ for me. In the midst of this infernal larum, Conscience (and be damm'd to her) baking & yelping as loud as any of them, I have sat down to read over again your **Satire** on **me** in the Anthology—. And I think I do begin to spy out something like beauty & design in it. I perfectly accede to all your alterations, and only desire that you had cut deeper, when your hand was in. In the next edition of the Anthology . . . please to blot out *gentle hearted*, and substitute drunken dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-ey'd, stuttering, or any other epithet which truly and properly belongs to the Gentleman in question. And for Charles read Tom, or Bob or Richard, *for more delicacy*. **Damn** you, I was beginning to forgive you, & believe in earnest that the lugging in of my Proper name was purely unintentional on your part, when looking back for future conviction, stares me in the face Charles Lamb **of the India House**. **Now** I am convinced it was all done in **Malice**, heaped,

sack-upon-sack, congregated, studied Malice. **You Dog!** (Bold type and italics as original; Aug, 1800; Lamb, *Letters* 1:224)

It might also have been true to Lamb that ‘the friend’ the poem describes was altogether different from Lamb himself. A poem actually addressing Wordsworth and Thelwall might indeed not have pleased Lamb if it falsely claimed to be dedicated to him. Considering Coleridge’s friendship with Thelwall, the poem involves a political context in terms of the scientific interest in ‘life’ of the age, and suggests a link between poetic vision and scientific argument. Coleridge’s idealism in poetry served to create this fine piece of poetry. His acceptance of Berkeley’s idealism, however, seemed not to contribute so much to developing a natural philosophy updated by the latest knowledge in the practical sciences, though he did not lose his respect for Bishop Berkeley. For Coleridge, the question of life remained ever after.

NOTES

Abbreviations

CL *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

PW Coleridge, *Poetical Works*

¹ One of these few surviving letters from Thelwall to Coleridge appears in Gibbs. This letter, dated 10 May 1796, suggests that Coleridge wrote a letter to Thelwall after his reception of Thelwall’s previous letter which was, according to Thelwall, ‘voluminous’, and sent to Coleridge between late April and early May 1796. Yet this letter by Coleridge has been lost (85). See also Roe, ‘Coleridge and John Thelwall’ 68–70.

² Coleridge was invited to set up a school in Derby, but this plan was soon cancelled. See *CL* 1:209, 229–31, 234, and 240. Coleridge also considered becoming ‘A Dissenting Parson’, and while in connection with Dr. Beddoes, he was invited to write for the *Morning Chronicle*. See *CL* 1:210 and 226.

³ Coleridge’s essay, entitled ‘General Introduction; or, A Preliminary Treatise on Method’ in the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* published in 1818 was the first extensive result of this interest. See Coleridge, *Shorter Works* 1:625–87, and *Friend* 1:449–524.

⁴ The full text of the Thelwall’s essay is given in Roe, *Politics of Nature* 96–119. Roe points out that, due to Priestley’s book on electricity, the phrase ‘the vital fluid’ had become well-known among radical people, and ‘Political information was the “something”, equivalent to an “electrical fluid”, which, then diffused throughout the country, would animate and renovate the “natural order of things”’ (Roe, *Politics of Nature* 92).

⁵ According to Allen, ‘To the philosophical radicals Hartley’s work was most emphatically a gospel’ (23) as it shows the ways in which Newtonian science could be coupled with psychology in terms of ‘vibration’ and that the materialistic understanding of human beings would finally lead to a society governed by benevolence. Priestley was one of the most important advocates of Hartley’s doctrine, and he had made the Hartlean philosophy part of the radical context of the age. See, Priestley ‘An Examination’, especially xiii–xix, and Priestley’s ‘Introductory Essays to Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind’ (*Works* 3:169–73).

⁶ Hunter himself also wrote that he would ‘endeavour to show, that organization, and life, do not depend in the least on each other; that organization may arise out of living parts, and produce action, but that life can never rise out of, or depend on organization’ (Hunter 78). Coleridge, in his fullest expression of homage to Hunter, later wrote as follows: ‘The Hunterian idea of a life or vital principle, “*independent of the organization,*” yet each organ working instinctively towards its preservation, . . . demonstrates that John Hunter did not . . . individualize, or make an hypostasis of the principles of life, as a somewhat manifestable per se, and consequently itself a phaenomenon; the latency of which was to be attributed to accidental, or at least contingent causes, ex.gr.; the limits or imperfection of our senses, or the inaptness of the media: but that herein he philosophized in the spirit of the *purest* Newtonians, who in like manner refused to hypostasize the law of gravitation into an ether . . .’ (Coleridge, *Friend* 1:493–94). Regarding the Hunterian debate during the 1810s, see Coleridge *Shorter Works and Fragments* 1:481–3.

⁷ The question of the existence of this substance had been problematic, and it is claimed that Newton might have had in mind some electrical phenomena when he wrote about aether in *Principia*. See *Principia* 280–82.

⁸ This can be read as Coleridge’s phrasing of Hartley’s justification of ‘benevolence’ based on the associative mechanism of the mind. See Coleridge *Lectures 1795*, lxi.

⁹ Reeve Parker, for example, gives a biographical interpretation of the poem, especially in terms of the relation between Coleridge’s friendship with Charles Lamb and his religious thought (20–39); James Engell extensively explores the poem’s background in natural philosophy, particularly in relation to George Berkeley and Neo-Platonism (81–96); Anne K. Mellor elegantly delineates how the poem incorporates aesthetic categories, such as ‘picturesque’ and ‘sublime’ into the development of its ideas (253–70). The conversational aspect of the poem has also been examined. Lucy Newlyn suggests that it underlies Coleridge’s poetic conversation with Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree’ (18–24); John Gutteridge points to some general influence of Cowper on Coleridge, also commenting on Coleridge’s absorbing Dorothy’s natural description in her diary while revising the poem (160–69).

¹⁰ See Wu, *Romanticism: An Anthology* 322–23. In this poem Thelwall

describes similar scenes of natural landscape to those which Coleridge described in the poem, such as ‘poetic dreams/ In dell romantic, or by bubbling brook,/ High wood, or rocky shore’ (lines 25–27).

¹¹ As for Coleridge’s use of the term ‘sister’, see *PW* 1:350.

¹² The sonnet is entitled ‘Stanzas on Hearing for Certainty that We were to be Tried for High Treason’, which begins with the line, ‘Short is perhaps our date of life’. See Wu, *Romanticism An Anthology* 318–19.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Richard C. *David Hartley on Human Nature*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Berkeley, George. *Philosophical Works*. Ed. M.R. Ayers. London: Everyman’s Library, 1975.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71.
- . *The Friend*. Ed. Barbara E. Rooke. *Collected Works*. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- . *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*. Ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann. *Collected Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- . *Poems on Various Subjects 1796*. Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1990.
- . *Poetical Works*. Ed. J.C.C. Mays. *Collected Works*. 6 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- . *Shorter Works and Fragments*. Ed. H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson. *Collected Works*. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- . *The Watchman*. Ed. Lewis Patton. *Collected Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Engell, James. ‘Imagining into Nature: This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’. *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination*. Ed. J. Robert Barth and John Mahoney. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990.
- Gibbs, Warren E. ‘An Unpublished Letter from John Thelwall to S.T. Coleridge’. *Modern Language Review* 25 (1930): 85–90.
- Gutteridge, John. ‘Scenery and Ecstasy: Three of Coleridge’s Blank Verse Poems’. *New Approaches to Coleridge: Biographical and Critical Essay*. Ed. Donald Sultana. London: Barnes and Noble, 1981. 151–71.
- Hartley, David. *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*. Virginia: Lincoln-Rembrandt Publishing, 1989 [1834].
- Hunter, John. *A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds*. London: John Richardson, 1794.
- Jackson, J.R. de J., ed. *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970.

- Mellor, Anne K. 'Coleridge's 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' and the Categories of English Landscape'. *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (1979): 253–70.
- Lamb, Charles and Mary Ann. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Ann Lamb*. Ed. Edwin W. Marris. 3 vols. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975-8.
- Newlyn, Lucy. *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- Newton, Isaac. *The Principia: Mathematical Principle of Natural Philosophy*. Trans. I. Bernald Cohen and Anne Whitman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Parker, Reeve. *Coleridge's Meditative Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Priestley, Joseph. *An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, Dr Beattie's Essay on the Nature and immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald's Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf on Religion*. New York, Garland Publishing, 1978 [1774].
- . *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works*. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1972 [1818].
- Roe, Nicholas. 'Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey'. *The Coleridge Connection*. Ed. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990. 60–80.
- . *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Standford, Elizabeth. *Thomas Poole and His Friends*. Over Stowey: Friarn Press, 1996 [1888].
- Vickers, Neil. *Coleridge and the Doctors*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.
- Wordsworth, William. *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*. Ed. James Butler. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979.
- Wu, Duncan. ed. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Third Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.