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Never/Nor: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Hartley Coleridge in Poetry's Transfictional Worlds

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This essay examines the poetry of father and son poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and Hartley Coleridge (1796–1849) with respect to the theme of transfictionality, a recent coinage in literary and especially fiction studies. While the term "transfictionality" has lately been used to refer to "the migration of fictional entities across different texts" (Ryan 365; Pearson 113), I suggest this term can also be applied more broadly to refer to texts that are at once mimetic and imaginary. Transfictional can also mean, I suggest, literary content that straddles the line between fact and fiction, i.e., between what is taken to be the 'real world' and an imaginary setting or ideal transmutation of apparently real content. The two Coleridges, Samuel Taylor and Hartley, both evidence a tendency to produce poetry that is transfictional in this sense, constructing Pantisocracy, an utopian intellectual colony in America, and Ejuxria, an imaginary kingdom based in the English Lake District, as examples of world-building activity that is not entirely based in either fact or fiction, but relies on the commingling of the two. By examining poetic writing that is transfictional as productive of both political and personal poetry, I hope to suggest in part both the transfictional nature of poetry's idealising tendencies, as well as its potential to be a form of world-building writing that should be seen as generically similar to (but still distinct from) narrative forms like prose fiction (especially Sci-Fi/Fantasy) and video games.

In this paper, I would like to focus on elements of world-building in the poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and Hartley Coleridge (1796–1849), using a transfictional framework to study the father and son poets side by side. While the term "transfictionality" has lately been used to refer to "the migration of fictional entities across different texts" (Ryan 365; Pearson 113), I suggest this term can also be applied more broadly to refer to texts that are at once mimetic and imaginary. Poetry is where world-building that is transfictional in this sense tends to occur (an observation I hope to substantiate below). Furthermore, such an insight might help us place poetry generically with respect to more popular forms like prose fiction, cinema, and video games. Particularly as "expansive

storyworlds" have become the "dominant narrative form" since the 1980s (Pearson 113), there is space to contemplate elements of world-building in poetry as a genre that some scholars claim has lost much of its cultural relevance since the early twentieth century.[i]

It might be wondered why I have chosen to focus on two poets from the nineteenth century rather than some contemporary poets who are active in our current age of expanded, transmedial storytelling. Indeed, some notable books of contemporary poetry have co-opted elements from video games, including adapting the structure of game storyworlds (or "gameworlds") and using gamified language, such as Stephen Sexton's *If All the World and Love Were Young* (2019) and Liam Bates's *Human Townsperson* (2022). However, it is arguable that these texts are largely concerned with how such game elements can foreground new uses and arrangements of language for the sake of novelty rather than with promoting immersion in a literary world and/or "building" a world.[ii] In that sense, they merely gamify some aspects of verse to serve the ends of poetical foregrounding. Conversely, both Samuel Taylor Coleridge (hereafter "STC") and Hartley Coleridge (hereafter "Hartley") shared a writerly proclivity to build or project worlds within their poems, worlds that were neither completely mimetic nor completely ideal, but that existed in transfictional spaces partly drawn from reality and partly composed of imaginative elements.

Notably, neither STC nor Hartley had access to digitalized gameworlds or virtual environments ("VE"s) aside from the virtuality of the imagination (a frequent theme of British Romantic poetry). Hence, they could not write about or from a space of digital immersion, nor incorporate any cultural elements accrued from immersive game-based or VE experiences. This is an important distinction to make, and one which is deserving of greater exploration elsewhere. While contemporary poems sometimes experiment with combining real events and digital narrative structures inspired by (or directly imitative of) video games, they do not by that fact attempt to reify coherent imaginary worlds that contain, for example, nascent or emergent political and economic formations. Such formations represent a prominent feature of STC's Pantisocracy, which I argue was translated into a poetical world both before and after it failed to become a physically real space; and Hartley's Ejuxria, an imaginary kingdom whose immersive qualities can be directly related to a background knowledge of real-world structures (even if these structures are historically contingent).

I also want to use this framework as an opportunity to put the father and son poets into a kind of conversation which they have not usually been able to have. Often, STC has been read in isolation, or in the company of the Romantic "big five" or "big six" poets, especially his creative partner William Wordsworth (1770–1850). Hartley, by contrast, is read against

STC alone, as if to be studied at all he first needed to be extricated from his father's shadow. Recently, some scholars have argued that Hartley's writing is more formally coherent and skilful than STC's and that he should be read as a gifted poet in his own right.[iii] While I agree that Hartley's neglect stems in part from his father's famousness, it is also the case that his poetry frequently chooses to exist in the shadow of the past self-consciously, and to render it completely "shadowless" would be to rob it of an important affective dimension. I prefer to see these two poets as an imaginative dyad who, while they did not share much of a working relationship, nevertheless came together thematically in giving examples of poetical transfictionality, exemplifying the imagination not as a source of aesthetic retreat but as a way of engaging with possible worlds that we could call ontologically proximate—that is, fictional, but still nearby to the "real" world in noticeable ways.

In most literature concerning STC's Pantisocracy, it is treated as an aborted political and emigrational scheme with ties to Christian millenarianism rather than as an imaginative directive that allowed STC to construct, in poetry as well as prose, a transfictional literary and utopian community that he projected into the untamed American wilderness. As such, many scholars have failed to notice the world-building elements that STC's Pantisocratic writing vouchsafes; elements that would go on to inform and enrich his body of work, including some of his best poems. In "Pantisocracy and the Myth of the Poet," Nicholas Roe sees the scheme as encapsulating an impossible journey "from the realm of ideals to life as it was actually lived" in the 1790s (89). Emphasizing the physicality of STC and fellow poet Robert Southey's environments (Southey lived in "undergraduate rooms next to the lavatories at the back of Balliol College" [89]; STC, a lover of creature comfort, "would have been hogging the fire" rather than helping to dig a garden [91]), Roe reduplicates the verdict that the scheme represents "a preposterous, mad-cap fantasy" (90). He does see a kind of transmutation of the Pantisocratic ideal to poetic creation, but the scheme's original "radicalism" is lost in "a myth of the poet's [Southey's] development" and utopian America becomes "an ideal destination that is compelling yet forever out of reach" (100).

On the contrary, I see Pantisocracy's straddling of "ideality" (a word coined by STC in a lecture on poetry of 1808)[iv] and reality as forming a real, not mythic, part of STC's poetic and philosophical development. The "Pantisocracy poems" he wrote in the mid-1790s represent prototypes of the conversation poems of the later 1790s and early 1800s, which are seen as representing an advancement in his style. The link between the conversation poems and the Pantisocracy poems is strengthened when we consider that the former group were given the alternative name "Poems of Friendship" by G.M. Harper, who also gave them the name

"Conversation Poems" (Magnuson 53). The latter name, having become the preferred usage, somewhat obscures this friendly Pantisocratic theme.[v] Indeed, Paul Magnuson has written of the crucial role that "other persons" have to play in these poems (53), and what is missing from the Pantisocracy poems—but is almost in view—is a sense of dependency and reliance on others, and a depiction of the radicality of dwelling together in a new world.[vi] It is rather the "ideal destination" of America that is transformative, and in these poems, the power of the outer world to alchemize suffering begins to necessitate the construction of a transfictional poetic space.

The main function of the poems Coleridge was writing in the mid-1790s was to imagine the speaker transported to America, living a life in which "[v]irtue calm with careless step may stray" ("Sonnet on Pantisocracy" *Poetical Works* [hereafter *PW*] I: 131 ll. 6). These poems likewise imagine the transformation of past pain into present joy:

> And dancing to the moonlight Roundelay
> The wizard Passions weave an holy spell.
> Eyes, that have ak'd with sorrow! Ye shall weep
> Tears of doubt-mingled Joy—as they, who start
> From precipices of distemper'd Sleep
> ("Sonnet on Pantisocracy" *PW* I: 131 ll. 7-11)

The "moonlight Roundelay" that appears in the sonnet's seventh line is a simple instance of world-building based on the communal act of dance and brings to mind the opening lines of *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene I: "Round about the cauldron go; / In the poison'd entrails throw".[vii] Presumably, the circle dance involves a friendly group who have gathered outside at night, as if to do something clandestine; but rather than cast an evil spell, they dance in order to "weave an holy spell" that will heal them of the ills brought on by the injurious societies from which they have emigrated (waking from "distemper'd Sleep"). The same sentiments and language echo in the last stanza of "The Sigh," composed a month later (in November 1794) for STC's sweetheart Mary Evans:

> And tho' in distant climes to roam,
> A Wanderer from my native home,
> I fain would sooth the sense of Care,

And lull to sleep the Joys, that were!

Thy Image may not banish'd be—

Still, Mary! still I sigh for thee.

(*PW* I: 128 ll. 19-24)

In his "Monody on the Death of Chatterton," which STC worked and reworked throughout his life,[viii] the poet revives Chatterton in his projected American community, transplanting him into a social and emotional environment where his artistic labour would assume central importance:

O, Chatterton! that thou wert yet alive!

Sure thou would'st spread the canvass to the gale,

And love, with us, the tinkling team to drive

O'er peaceful Freedom's undivided dale;

And we, at sober eve, would round thee throng,

Hanging, enraptur'd, on thy stately song!

And greet with smiles the young-eyed Poesy

All deftly mask'd, as hoar Antiquity.

(*PW* I: 144 ll. 126-133)

The image of the roundelay recurs here as emblematic, not of Chatterton's poetic supremacy, but of the commingling of kinship bonds and art as mutually reinforcing. STC's affectionate imagining of Chatterton, which did not change over the years even as he questioned and rethought his ties to Unitarianism, pantheism, Spinozism, Platonism, and various other cosmogonies, is rooted in the dead poet's being a Pantisocrat in spirit–in being "one of us": "thou wouldst … love, *with us*, the tinkling team to drive / O'er peaceful Freedom's undivided dale". Chatterton both loves being together with them and loves in the same way that they love, an exemplar of the new society. STC's hauntological[ix] imagination brings both living persons and the spirits of the departed together in forms of communal stewardship that transcend the real.

While it might be arguable that these poems lack traditional elements of world-building─particularly in the sense this term has taken on in describing or critiquing works of high fantasy—I would counter with two claims. The first is that these and other of STC's poems

often represent the speaker's intersection with an imaginary world defined essentially as "places for stories to happen" (Ekman and Taylor 8); the second is that, in these Pantisocracy-focused poems especially, phrases such as "distant climes" and "undivided dale" are coded as America, and represent for STC and his contemporary readers a fantastic space not only where emotional renewal and social cohesion can occur and be felt, but also where the past, both personal and universal, can be examined from a safe distance. In the second example especially (from "The Sigh"), we sense that the speaker's desire is to be able to put certain concerns and emotional attachments to rest (the phrase "Joys, that were!" is one that appears at various places in all three of the excerpted poems), yet, he avows he will not "banish" Mary's "Image" but continue to contemplate it as a "Wanderer from my native home". This coincidence of past and present lends to the poetry a fantastical quality that is complicated by the fact that America was (and is) a real-world location, and study of STC's life furnishes evidence that he and other Pantisocrats were prepared to go and live there, even if the venture was ultimately ill-founded.

I believe one reason that poetry is not seen as involved in world-building is that it so often appears to take the real world as its subject. Yet, STC offers a case study of a poet whose finest poems, such as "Frost at Midnight" (1798), "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" (1797), and "Love" (1799) tend to flow out of the same transfictional space previously built up in the Pantisocratic writings. This suggests that strong poetry is involved in the creation and, just as importantly, the repeated revisiting of worlds—that is, places where stories happen—that hold a certain oblique relation to the real world without being exactly coincident with it. In STC's case, these are worlds in which the simplicity of communal, domestic life, drawn variously from his own experience, is bordered by the immensity of an unknown, often sacred or forbidding wilderness that communicates with past (or future) time.

A selection of lines from each of these poems (and some explanation) will furnish evidence for this claim:

> 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
> ("Frost at Midnight" *PW* I: 456 ll. 54-58; emphasis in original)

<div style="text-align:center">Now, my Friends emerge</div>

Beneath the wide wide Heaven—and view again

The many-steepled track magnificent

Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,

With some fair bark, perhaps, whose Sails light up

The slip of smooth clear blue between two Isles

Of purple shadow!

("This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" *PW* I: 352 ll. 20-26)

I play'd a soft and doleful air,

I sang an old and moving story—

An old rude song, that suited well

  That ruin wild and hoary.

("Love" *PW* I: 607 ll. 21-24)

In each of these examples, it is a transfictional world about which the poet is speaking, although in each one, such a world is invoked in slightly differing ways. In "Frost at Midnight," the babe inhabits an ideal (and idyllic) space of his father's own imagining. Yet, the potential for this space to coincide with the real world is what allows the speaker to feel buoyed up by excitement. It sounds, for example, as if the speaker of "Frost at Midnight" is describing the Lake District (especially "the clouds, / Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores"), but when STC wrote this poem, the family was still living at Nether Stowey, and the move to Greta Hall in Keswick would not come for another two years. It is in the space between reality and the ideal where the child "wanders like a breeze," occupying a kind of Pantisocratic wilderness of his own making. Similarly, in "Lime-tree Bower," it is a world of possibilities into which the speaker's friends "emerge" (the perfect verb); the "wide wide Heaven" of visual imagination places them into an imaginary (and immersive) experience and within this experience, they receive pleasure at sights which seem to be self-revealing: if there is a "fair bark" ("perhaps"), then its sails will themselves allow the revelation of another scene, one which seems attached to their existence. The "Isles" bathed in "purple shadow" are unknown, hinting at further reaches.

I want to pause here to point out that I am not attempting to erect an interpretation that simply returns to a view of this poetry as being chiefly concerned with the imagination. My

point is that all these poems are concerned with creating spaces where stories can be allowed to take place and that, crucially, these spaces are transfictional, involving and inspiring imaginative projection onto the real. These kinds of spaces have been called "worlds" in other literature (Ekman and Taylor 8) and in most literature of world-building. It might be our assumption that the worlds come, and then the stories follow. Perhaps in a poetic mode, the telling of stories is the author's foremost concern, and the worlds are merely devices—which could explain why poetic worlds tend to be vaguer and more idealized than their prose counterparts.[x] In the case of STC, however, I believe that all these worlds have the same function as the ones he created and projected in his Pantisocracy poems: the creation of a place, usually signposted as being in "nature" (though not always), where emotional renewal can occur due to the achievement of a certain distancing from the past.

Hence, in "Frost at Midnight," the passage about the babe is immediately preceded by a painful recollection of the speaker's time as a child "pent 'mid cloisters dim" (*PW* I: 455 ll. 53). In "Lime-tree Bower," the immersive pleasure of the walk overtakes the speaker's immediate situation, which is that he is lamed by an unfortunate accident and cloistered at home in the bower of his garden.[xi] The trauma that was so central to the poetic experience in the earlier poems has been displaced in these, but not by much. The transfictional worlds that they create are designed to offer an experiential bridge between painful immediacy and a mediated story-world where healing can occur, either directly (recounted in what we might think of as traditional "Greater Romantic Lyric"-type languages)[xii] or through the feelings of another person (in STC's more conversational style).

"Love" offers one of STC's greatest meditations on this kind of vicariousness. Like the earlier "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," it is about the act of storytelling itself and comprises a tale within a tale. The poem's second stanza might well be its opening:

> Oft in my waking dreams do I
> Live o'er again that happy hour,
> When midway on the mount I lay,
>   Beside the ruin'd tower.
> (*PW* I: 607 ll. 5-9)

This is a story about a person remembering a story and remembering how the hearing of that story affected another person. The speaker knows "She loves me best, when'er I sing" (607 ll. 19) because, in singing, the speaker brings other people (and places) to life. The poem

recounts the physical changes that undergo the listener, Genevieve, whom the speaker attempts to woo through the retold actions of another: "She listen'd with a flitting blush" (607 ll. 25; 608 ll. 37); "She wept with pity and delight" (609 ll. 77); "Her bosom heav'd" (609 ll. 81); "She fled to me and wept" (609 ll. 84). These actions, which even in STC's time would have come off as the stuff of clichéd courtship, take on a new significance when they are recounted as specific, visceral responses to the story-world the speaker is telling about, and it is especially interesting to us that this story-world is built up within the same text. In fact, the speaker of "Love" builds three nested text worlds on top of the reader's discourse world: the one in which he has "waking dreams"; the one in which he and Genevieve are together beside "The statue of the armed knight" (607 ll. 14) (technically, a memory); and the one of which he, in this memory, sings, in which the knight is "nursed … in a cave" by "The Lady of the Land" (608 ll. 61; 608 ll. 56).

It is my suggestion that "Love" is not about heaving bosoms or about valiant knights and pitying (or coy) women but is, in fact, a meditation on the transfictional nature of verse. It is an evolution of an important idea from STC's long poem of 1975, "The Destiny of Nations": "For all that meets the bodily sense I deem / Symbolical, one mighty alphabet" (*PW* I: 282 ll. 18-19); only now the poetic speaker is the one who creates an "alphabet" with both semantic and symphonic (i.e. sound-based) components. This, in turn, connects poetic creation as world-building to STC's theory of the symbol, which he would develop in the latter years of his career.[xiii] Thus, there is a kind of thread running through STC's poetry and prose, one that we can trace from Pantisocracy, with its projection of American wilderness, onwards to the conversation poems, the meditations on social imagination (which includes 1802's "Dejection: An Ode") and even into his more mature philosophical writings.

Hartley, Ejuxria, and Ideality

STC's son Hartley spent much of his childhood living in an imaginary world of his own creation called "Ejuxria". As Joetta Harty recounts, Ejuxria was first inspired during a visit to Basil and Anna Montagu, who were family friends, around 1806 (Hartley would have been ten years old) (Harty 71). Interestingly, this was also the year that STC would return to England from his self-exile to the Mediterranean since 1804, although he continued afterward to remain distant from his immediate family. Encountering a globe in the Montagu's home, the enterprising Hartley had soon "found a spot … which he peopled with an imaginary nation, gave them a name, language, laws, and a senate; where he framed long speeches, which he *translated* … for my benefit" (*Letters of Hartley Coleridge* xxxiii; quoted in Harty 71;

emphasis in original). The idea of translation is important here, for it suggests that one of the original functions of Ejuxria was not to escape the real world but to imitate it, albeit in a context in which "King Hartley delivered royal pronouncements" (Harty 71).

After returning home to Greta Hall, Ejuxria became even more anchored in the real, beginning life as "Jugforcia"—a name that suggests water being poured out of a jug—before becoming "Ejuxria" again:

> [H]e imagined himself to foresee a time when, in a field that lay close to the house in which he lived, a small cataract would burst forth, to which he gave the name of Jug-force. The banks of the stream thus created, … it soon overflowed, as it were, the narrow spot in which it was originally generated, and Jugforcia, disguised under the less familiar appellation of Ejuxria, became an island-continent, with its own attendant isles. (*Poems by Hartley Coleridge* xxxvi; quoted in Harty 71-72)

Like his father, Hartley overlays his imaginary society—notably a kingdom rather than an intellectual colony—upon a real-world place (a "field that lay close to [his] house"). And like Pantisocracy itself, inspiring STC's sonnets and conversation poems, the main real-world influence of this imaginary kingdom was in the form of writings and missives, "translated" speeches, and language related to their interpretation. Hartley took the world-building one step further than his father. As his younger brother Derwent Coleridge later noted, Hartley would induce imaginary play involving Ejuxria by announcing the arrival of "letters and papers" and a "budget of news … his words flowing on in an exhaustless stream, and his countenance bearing witness to the inspiration … by which he was agitated" (*Poems* xxxix; quoted in Harty 73). Later on, as has been asserted by Lisa Gee, Andrew Keanie, and others, Hartley would go on to become one of his generation's finest sonnet-writers, channelling his original Ejuxrian (or Jug-forcian) inspiration into poems that reflect on time, love, loss, and other traditional themes.

Disappointingly, Hartley Coleridge does not seem to have wanted to write about his beloved childhood kingdom as a mature poet—at least not directly. But the titles and subject matter of some of his poems nevertheless seem pregnant with the idea of a lost or imaginary place, noble and structured around a pregiven hierarchy. "While I Survey …" is a sonnet that seeks to invoke "the Past with things that were" (notice the parallel between "things that were" and STC's "joys that were") "Throng'd in dark multitude"; whereas the "Future [is] bare"

(*Bricks Without Mortar* [hereafter *BM*] 28 ll. 2-3). His poem "Spenser" evinces an appreciation, not just for the eponymous poet, but for the transfictional in verse:

> Thine is no tale, once acted, then forgot;
>
> Thy creatures never were, and never will be not.
>
> Oh! look not for them in the dark abyss
>
> Where all things have been, and where nothing is—
>
> The spectral past;—nor in the troubled sea
>
> Where all strange fancies are about to be—
>
> The unabiding present.
>
> (*BM* 62 ll. 12-17)

Rather seek, writes Hartley "where / For ever lives the Good, the True, the Fair, / In the eternal silence of the heart" (*BM* 62 ll. 17-19). It is this undefined here—a space of poetic "ideality" –where such characters are "evoked in feature, form, and limb / Real as a human self" (62 ll. 21-22). I see these lines less as offering praise to Spenser's art and more as interested in expressing something about the world-building aspects of Spenser's verse (specifically "The Faery Queene"). Hartley seems to have relocated his father's sense of Pantisocracy as a kind of society possible only on unowned, undeveloped land into "the eternal silence of the heart." Thus, in his sonnet "Who is the Poet?", he connects "Virtue" to "the strict confines / Of [a] positive law": a law that recognizes humanity as marked, but not marred, by an essential betweenness, "Rooted in earth, yet tending to the sky" of an idealised or imagined world (*BM* 31 ll. 8-9, 11). Hartley symbolises the human as a flower "that loves the lowly ground" yet by its "sweetness, wings her way on high" (*BM* 31 ll. 13-14).

In "Fairy Land," Hartley seems on the cusp of invoking his own lost kingdom:

> For, though I never was a citizen,
>
> Enroll'd in Faith's municipality,
>
> And ne'er believed the phantom of the fen
>
> To be a tangible reality,
>
> Yet I have loved sweet things, that are not non,
>
> In frosty starlight, or the cold moonbeam.
>
> I never thought they were; and therefore now

No doubt obscures the memory of my dream.

My Fairy Land was never upon earth,

Nor in the heaven to which I hoped to go

(*Genius Disregarded* [hereafter *GD*] 55 ln. 6-15)

This sense of the "never/nor" is the metapoetic infusion which, in Hartley's writing, is more a direct theme than in STC's: "Fairy Land," as an imaginary place which is somehow removed from a Christian metaphysical scheme (making it different than a merely transcendent realm), resides in a place detached from the child's religious affect, and is attached instead to the ephemeral nature of the real itself. This is the theme of Hartley's poem above and is a direct thematic echo of his father's poem "Frost at Midnight" (the part about "frosty starlight, or the cold moonbeam" sounds like both the beginning and ending of "Frost at Midnight"). Hence it is not only the abstracts of temperature, weather, or celestial influence that bring about intimations of Fairy Land, but likewise, "the glimmering hearth," "the sole taper's intermittent light," "the slow-tolling bell" (*GD* 55 ll. 16, 19, 20) create a twilight mood wherein the speaker becomes able to believe that stories, which imitate reality but remain set apart from it, are truthful as echoes: their "deeds [were] things of yesterday" (*GD* 55 ll. 22).

Related to this conceit is Hartley's conviction, on display in poems such as "A Schoolfellow's Tribute to the Memory of the Rev Owen Lloyd," that processes of cultivation, including education itself, have a pernicious influence on the human mind, which, far from being a Lockean *tabula rasa*, is capable from an early age of original and even profound conceptions. He writes of Owen Lloyd in "childish days" that "Fine wit he had, and knew not it was wit, / And native thoughts before he dreamed of thinking"; likewise "Odd sayings … / To oldest sights the newest fancies linking" (*GD* 64 ll. 5-8). This apparition of the new among the old, an intermixture weaved of the real and the fanciful, is the "positive law" that he sees as giving rise to virtue. Hartley's understanding of the mind mirrors his father's democratic faith in the working power of a Pantisocracy: "The leading Idea … is to make men *necessarily* virtuous by removing all Motives to Evil – all possible Temptations … It is each Individual's *duty* to be Just, *because* it is in his *Interest*" (*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, I: 115). This is also a framework of virtue that seems to apply especially to the idea of man as a creature, i.e., a created being, although Hartley often confesses that the why and wherefore of man is mysterious. Like Wordsworth, Hartley seems to identify a kind of loss that comes with ageing; for Owen Lloyd, it involves the appearance of "a woeful weight … He could not bear, and yet could not withstand" (*GD* 65 ll. 29, 32). Although it is something of a Romantic truism

that the professional world is a manufacturer of human woe, Hartley's lifelong position outside of the workforce or any respectable profession—his father's worst fears realised–makes him an especially trenchant critic, so long as we see his shiftless existence as a volitional choice.

To conclude, I hope that in attempting to show the presence of the transfictional–read as poetical content that straddles the line between mimesis and Romantic ideological projection–in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Hartley Coleridge, I have likewise shown how readily much verse conforms to its own idea of world-building and presents elements of world-building in a way different than prose (or, indeed, in video games). This difference should not be taken for an absence of intention, as much poetry draws on discrete idealised (but still physical) forms taken from a common idea of reality so as to gesture at the threshold of a possible world. In the case of STC, this world began (and often continued to be) a "community world" whose most prominent feature was its commonality and its unrealizability in the imagination of the sole creative. It was required for a group of sympathetic or at least like-minded individuals to attempt to raise it out of the common earth, and Pantisocracy was the blueprint for such a world. Hartley Coleridge's worlds are softer and suffused with the shadows of the past but still balance on a precipice between the non-real and the merely imaginative, i.e., as Fairy. Both father and son provide examples of the force of transfictional verse in British Romanticism, showing the creativity that can come from thinking about change and the possibility of change while still rooted firmly in the real world.

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Notes

[i] See Epstein, "Who Killed Poetry?"; Steele, *Missing Measures*; Gioia, *Can poetry matter?*; and
Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*.

[ii] For example, Sexton's long poem is written in sixteen-syllable lines to mirror the sixteen-bit
memory system of the Super Nintendo. Although there is formal consistency, I would argue that such
long lines are difficult to process as metrical groupings and therefore serve to increase the reader's
cognitive load. Sexton also writes in a stream-of-consciousness style that is frequently obscure, rather
than, as with the two Coleridges, a style that is grammatically parsimonious and, especially with
Hartley, transparently sentimental.

iii See Gee, *Bricks Without Mortar*; and Keanie, *Genius Disregarded*.

iv See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures on Literature* I, 145.

v For this article I use the uncapitalized "conversation poems".

vi Pantisocracy as a political movement was involved in a reassessment of friendship that more broadly characterized the radical 1790s, and the creation of elected rather than inherited families was uppermost in STC and Southey's discourse at the time. See Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s*, especially 26–30.

vii William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene I, ll. 1–2.

viii See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works* I, 139-140.

ix The word 'hauntology' is a Derridean philosophical pun (haunt + ontology) that implies the ghostly presence of the past within the present: a 'thinking of Being' that includes absence together with presence. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

x STC himself argued that poetic language should be non-specific: "I adopt with full faith the principle of Aristotle, that poetry as poetry is essentially *ideal . . .*". See *Biographia Literaria*, II: Chapter 17, 45–46.

xi See Coleridge, *Poetical Works* I, 350.

xii See Abrams, "Structure and style in the greater romantic lyric," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 527-60.

xiii See Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 18.