1796: 1834:

EFFUSION XXXV. THE EOLIAN HARP.

Composed August 20th, 1795, at Clevedon, Sommersetshire Composed at Clevedon, Sommersetshire.

My pensive Sara! Thy soft cheek reclined My pensive Sara! Thy soft cheek reclined

Thus on my arm, most soothing sweet it is Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is

To sit beside our cot, our cot o’ergrown To sit beside our cot, our cot o’ergrown

With white-flowered dvanta, and the broad-leaved myrtle With white-flowered dvanta, and the broad leaved myrtle

(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!) (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)

And Watch the clouds, that late were rich with light, And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,

Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve

Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be) Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)

Shine opposite!! How exquisite the scents Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents

Snatched from yon bean-field! And the world *so* hushed! Snatched from yon bean-field! And the world so hushed!

The stilly murmur of the distant sea The stilly murmur of the distant sea

Tells us of silence. And that simplest lute, Tells us of silence.

Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark! And that simplest lute,

How by the desultory breeze caressed, Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!

Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover, How by the desultory breeze caressed,

It pours such sweet upbraidings, as must needs Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,

Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs

Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings

Over delicious surges sink and rise, Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes

Such a soft floating withchery of sound Over delicious surges sink and rise,

As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve Such a soft floating witchery of sound

Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land, As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve

Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers, Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,

Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise, Where melodies round honey-dropping flowers,

Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing! Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,

Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing!

And thus, my love! As on the midway slope O the one life within us and abroad,

Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon, Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,

Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold A light in sound, a sound-like power in light

The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main, Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—

And tranquil muse upon tranquillity; Methinks, it should have been impossible

Full many a thought uncalled and undetained, Not to love all things in a world so filled;

And many idle flitting phantasies, Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air

Traverse my indolent and passive brain, Is music slumbering on her instrument.

As wild and various as the random gales

That swell and flutter on this subject lute! And thus, my love! As on the midway slope

Or what if all animated nature Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,

Be but organic harps diversely framed, Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold

That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps The sunbeams dance, like diamonds on the main,

Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, And tranquil muse upon tranquility;

At once the soul of each, and God of All? Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof And many idle flitting phantasies

Darts, O beloved woman! Nor such thoughts Traverse my indolent and passive brain,

Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject, As wild and various as the random gales

And biddest me walk humbly with my God. That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!

And what if all animated nature

Meek daughter in the family of Christ! Be but organic Harps diversely framed,

Well hast thou said and holily dispraised That tremble into thought, as over them sweeps

These shapings of the unregenerate mind; Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,

Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break At once the soul of each and God of all?

On vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring. But thy more serious eye a mild reproof

For never guiltless may I speak of him, Darts, O beloved Woman! Nor such thoughts

Th’ Incomprehensible! Save when with awe Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,

I praise him, and with faith that inly feels;\*[[1]](#footnote-1)1 And biddest me walk humbly with my God.

Who with his saving mercies healed me, Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!

A sinful and most miserable man, Well hast thou said and holily dispraised

Wildered and dark, and gave me to possess These shapings of the unregenerate mind;

Peace, and this cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid! Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break

On vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring.

For never guiltless may I speak of him,

The Incomprehensible! Save when with awe I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;

Who with his saving mercies healed me,

A sinful and a most miserable man,

Wildered and dark, and gave me to possess

Peace, and this cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid!

\**1*L’athée n’est point à mes yeux un faux esprit ; je puis vivre avec lui aussi bien et mieux qu’avec le dévot, car il raisonne davantage, mais il lui manque un sens, et mon âme ne se fond point entièrement avec la sienne : il est froid au spectacle le plus ravissant, et il cherche un syllogisme lorsque je rends une action de grâce. « Appel à l’impartiale postérité, par la Citoyenne Roland, » troisième partie, p. 113.

[The atheist is not, in my eyes, a man of ill faith: I can live with him as well, nay better than with the devotee, for he reasons more; but he is deficient in a certain sense, and his soul does not keep pace with mine; he is unmoved at a spectacle the most ravishing, and he hunts for a syllogism, where I am impressed with awe and admiration. (Coleridge, *PW,* I. 234-5. n60)]

Check the web for the meaning of the “eolian harp”

1. Read “Effusion XXXV, Composed August 20th, 1795, at Clevedon, Sommersetshire” published in *Poems on Varios Subjects,* 1796. The poem was retrospectively (!) called (by George M. Harper, 1926) Coleridge’s first “conversation poem” (other pieces of the genre include Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”*,* and several other poems by Coleridge – the term itself derives from C’s “The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem, April 1798”)
2. Knowing The Nightingale and Tintern Abbey*,* how would you characterise the structure of the genre? Why is it a *conversation* poem?
3. How would you divide the poem into 3 parts?
4. What are the changes (emotional, intellectual, religious) that the speaker is going through?
5. Can you decide what he “really” thinks, the stance he “really” opts for?
6. Look at the extract from the October 1795 issue of *The Analytical Review*: can you find the paragraph that is the translation of C’s French quotation from Mme Roland in the footnote? What does the context add to its meaning?
7. Read the later versions, published between 1817 and 1834 (for the sake of convenience, I copied here the 1834 version). What are the main differences between these versions and the earlier ones? Could you explain these differences? Can you imagine that the same lines mean different things in the two poems? (E.g. you can take into consideration C’s changing relationship with his wife, Sara, or his changing political/religious/philosophical stance)

1. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)