

= Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement =

Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement is a poem written by English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1796 . Like his earlier poem The Eolian Harp , the poem discusses Coleridge 's understanding of nature and his married life , which was suffering from problems that developed after the previous poem . Overall , the poem focuses on humanity 's relationship with nature in its various aspects ranging from experiencing an Edenic state to having to abandon a unity with nature in order to fulfill a moral obligation to humanity . The discussion of man 's obligation to each other leads into a discussion on the difference between the life of a philosopher and the life of a poet . By the end of the poem , the narrator follows the philosophical path in a manner similar to what Coleridge sought to do . The response to the poem from critics was mostly positive with many of them emphasizing the religious aspects of the poem in their analysis .

= = Background = =

After marrying Sarah Fricker in autumn 1795 , Coleridge left their home at Clevedon and began to travel throughout England in order to meet with various philosophers and political theorists . In part , he was trying to meet with people so he could raise subscriptions for his various works . During this time , he would write home constantly to his pregnant wife and was concerned about her state of health . His feelings of guilt , along with a fever that he treated with laudanum , affected him greatly and caused him to express these feelings in a letter to Josiah Wade on 10 February 1796 : " My past life seems to me like a dream , a feverish dream ! all one gloomy huddle of strange actions , and dim @-@ discovered motives ! Friendships lost by indolence , and happiness murdered by mismanaged sensibilities . "

After the letter , Coleridge returned to his wife who was now living with her family at Redcliffe Hill , Bristol . As he wrote The Eolian Harp to commemorate coming to his home at Clevedon , Coleridge composed Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement on leaving it . The poem was not included in Coleridge 's 1796 collection of poems as it was probably still incomplete , but it was published in the October 1796 Monthly Magazine under the title Reflections on Entering into Active Life . A poem Which Affects Not to be Poetry . Reflections was included in Coleridge 's 28 October 1797 collection of poems and the collections that followed . Of his early poems , Coleridge believed that Reflections was his best .

= = Poem = =

The poem begins with an idealisation of a " Valley of Seclusion " :

In the open air

Our Myrtles blossom 'd ; and across the porch

Thick Jasmins twined : the little landscape round

Was green and woody , and refresh 'd the eye .

It was a spot which you might aptly call

The Valley of Seclusion ! (lines 4 ? 9)

The poem continues with a goodbye to the valley and asks if his life of pleasure was appropriate :

I was constrain 'd to quit you . Was it right ,

While my unnumber 'd brethren toil 'd and bled ,

That I should dream away the entrusted hours

On rose @-@ leaf beds , pampering the coward heart

With feelings all too delicate for use ? (lines 44 ? 48)

The narrator describes the reasons why he is leaving Clevedon along with the allowance of remembering his former life there after his work is done :

I therefore go , and join head , heart , and hand ,

Active and firm , to fight the bloodless fight

Of Science , Freedom , and the Truth in CHRIST .

Yet oft when after honourable toil
Rests the tired mind , and waking loves to dream
My Spirit shall revisit thee , dear Cot ! (lines 60 ? 65)

= = Themes = =

The themes of Reflections are connected to Coleridge 's The Eolian Harp as the scene for both is the same . The land of Clevedon is praised and seen full of life , and it serves as contrast to escaping from the real world into fantasy and pondering about the abstract . Both poems also describe Coleridge 's relationship with his wife and feelings of sexual desire . The imagination aspects of the poem represent an unwillingness to accept nature on its own and rejects the conclusion of The Eolian Harp . Although the land of Clevedon can bring one closer to God , one cannot just simply exist in such an area but must seek out truth .

Feeling the need to seek out truth creates a separation between the mind of a poet and the mind of a philosopher . The poem reconciles the two by allowing the pursuer of truth to reflect on his time of simply enjoying nature and God 's presence . However , the philosopher aspect is dominant and the individual must go out and try to help humanity . Nature can be soothing , but the narrator must reject the Edenic quality of nature because such a state is not yet appropriate . The Edenic imagery figures into many of Coleridge 's poems and is reinforced with the image of myrtle trees and takes on many forms within his poetry . In Reflections , to dwell in an Edenic state is a paradise in which the narrator leaves voluntarily because he cannot ignore the problems of the world like a coward . Instead , the individual is compelled to join with humanity and even the lowest form of benefiting humanity is superior to doing nothing at all .

The image of nature and other themes reappears in Fears in Solitude (1798) . The later poem recreates the " Valley of Seclusion " image in the form of a dell . Even the image of a passerby looking in on the cottage found in Reflection is repeated . Similarly , the compulsion to enter into the world and help humanity is included , but it is altered from being motivated by guilt to a warning message against a possible invasion from outside forces . As such , Fears in Solitude does not seek to leave the location to help humanity , but to stay as a protector over his family .

In Coleridge 's own life , he tried to follow the path of the philosopher , but the 10 July 1834 entry in Table Talk admits that he was unable to do so : " so I own I wish life and strength had been spared to me to complete my Philosophy . For , as God hears me , the originating , continuing , and sustaining wish and design in my heart were to exalt the glory of his name ; and , which is the same thing in other words , to promote the improvement of humanity . But visum aliter Deo , and his will be done . "

In terms of Coleridge 's marriage , Reflections differs from The Eolian Harp by saying that there were problems within the marriage , especially with it distracting Coleridge from nature and the world outside of the home that he shared with his wife . The poem expresses feelings of solitude and confinement , and there is a difference between the worlds inside and outside of the cottage in a similar manner to the focus found within Coleridge 's Kubla Khan . This is especially true with a focus from the private to the public spheres . Within the outside world , the poem 's narrator is separate from humanity , but his focus is ever on humanity and contains both a religious and political component . The image of " One Life " within the poem compels him to abandon the sensual pleasures of the cottage and to pursue a path of helping humanity .

= = Critical response = =

The Critical Review saw favor with " To the River Otter " and Reflections in their review of the 1797 collection of Coleridge 's poem . The July review claims that the poem " evince a feeling heart . The comparison between the weeping eyes of a humane friend and the unmoved face of another equally benevolent , and the contrast between the latter and those who merely affect sympathy , are well drawn . "

During the 20th century , Virginia Radley declares that Reflections " although not so striking in

imagery as is the ' Eolian Harp , ' still has much to recommend it in this respect [...] The impression left with the reader that the cottage and its surroundings are inestimably lovely , quiet , and peaceful is a paramount one , while the dead lines [...] do not move the reader at all , except to make him wonder if the move from Clevedon for the cause of humanity was a necessary one . " Richard Haven argues that the poem 's image of the moral path is weak because " the returned traveller can only dismiss his ascent to another mode of being as a pleasant but useless memory " .

Anthony Harding believes " it is important to recognize that it steps outside the idyllic but circumscribed scene of ' The Eolian Harp ' , and admits the impossibility , in a fallen world , of human self @-@ sufficiency . " Oswald Doughty states that the " most important additions " to Coleridge 's 1797 edition of poems included Reflections . Richard Holmes points out that both Reflections and The Eolian Harp " mark a new stage in Coleridge 's exploration of the sacred relations between man and nature , which gradually become more serious and impassioned as they carry increasingly theological implications behind his Romanticism . "