

= The Eolian Harp =

The Eolian Harp is a poem written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1795 and published in his 1796 poetry collection . It is one of the early conversation poems and discusses Coleridge 's anticipation of a marriage with Sara Fricker along with the pleasure of conjugal love . However , The Eolian Harp is not a love poem and instead focuses on man 's relationship with nature . The central images of the poem is an Aeolian harp , an item that represents both order and wildness in nature . Along with the harp is a series of oppositional ideas that are reconciled with each other . The Eolian Harp also contains a discussion on " One Life " , Coleridge 's idea that humanity and nature are united along with his desire to try to find the divine within nature . The poem was well received for both its discussion of nature and its aesthetic qualities .

= = Background = =

Coleridge began writing The Eolian Harp on 20 August 1795 during his engagement to Sara Fricker . Like his previous conversation poem Lines Written at Shurton Bars , the poem discusses both his engagement and his future marriage . Coleridge was inspired to write the poem after a visit to a house in Clevedon that would serve as his and Fricker 's home after their marriage . As Coleridge worked on the poem , he and Fricker were married and they moved to the Clevedon home . During this time , Coleridge held an idealised view of his life with Fricker , and these thoughts work their way into the poem . The poem was published in the 1796 edition of Coleridge 's poems and in all subsequent collections . Of his poems for the 1796 collection , Coleridge felt that The Eolian Harp was his favourite .

After the poem 's original creation , it was expanded from its original use of an Aeolian harp as its theme over the months that followed . However , Coleridge did not stop working on it when it was first published . Instead , the poem was expanded and rewritten throughout Coleridge 's life until 1817 . Of the final version , lines 21 ? 25 were previously removed between the 1797 and 1815 editions of Coleridge 's poems . Likewise , lines 26 ? 33 were altered through the multiple editions . Regardless of the amount of editing , Coleridge believed that the poem served as a model for other poems , especially those in the series called Conversation poems . Of The Eolian Harp as a model for poetry , Coleridge wrote , " Let me be excused , if it should seem to others too mere a trifle to justify my noticing it ? but I have some claim to the thanks of no small number of the readers of poetry in having first introduced this species of short blank verse poems ? of which Southey , Lamb , Wordsworth , and others have since produced so many exquisite specimens . "

= = Poem = =

The poem begins by addressing Fricker and discussing the house at Clevedon :

My pensive Sara ! thy soft cheek reclined

Thus on mine arm , most soothing sweet it is

To sit beside our cot , our cot o 'ergrown

With white @-@ flower 'd Jasmin , and the broad @-@ leav 'd Myrtle ,

(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love !)

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

Slow saddening round , and mark the star of eve

Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)

Shine opposite ! How exquisite the scents

Snatch 'd from yon bean @-@ field ! and the world so hushed !

The stilly murmur of the distant Sea

Tells us of silence . (lines 1 ? 12)

As the poem continues , objects are described as if they were women being pursued :

And that simplest Lute ,

Plac 'd length @-@ ways in the clasping casement , hark !

How by the desultory breeze caressed ,
 Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover ,
 It pours such sweet upbraiding , as must needs
 Tempt to repeat the wrong ! (lines 12 ? 17)
 The poem then introduces Coleridge 's idea of " One Life " , where man and nature are connected :
 O the one Life within us and abroad ,
 Which meets all motion and becomes its soul ,
 A light in sound , a sound @-@ like power in light ,
 Rhythm in all thought , and joyance every where ?
 Methinks , it should have been impossible
 Not to love all things in a world so filled ;
 Where the breeze warbles , and the mute still air
 Is Music slumbering on her instrument . (lines 26 ? 33)
 Near the end of the poem , the narrator discusses pantheism before reproving himself for it soon
 after :
 And what if all of animated nature
 Be but organic Harps diversely framed ,
 That tremble into thought , as o 'er them sweeps
 Plastic and vast , one intellectual breeze ,
 At once the Soul of each , and God of all ? (lines 44 ? 48)

= = Themes = =

The poem discusses love , sex , and marriage , but it is not done in the form of a love poem . Instead , it compares love with an Aeolian harp , which is a symbol of poetry . In terms of the relationship described , the desire expressed during an engagement with Fricker is described as innocent . Also , the anticipation of the conjugal union is free of any potential disappointment or any guilt that would result in sex outside of marriage . As such , there is a thematic connection with the poem " Lines Written at Shurton Bars " written on the same subject around the same time . As the poem was completed after Coleridge 's marriage , the themes became similar to the ideas expressed in his Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement . Both poems discuss the Clevedon area and the impact of the countryside upon the viewer . Also , they provide information on how Coleridge and Fricker felt during their relationship and marriage . However , Reflections suggests that there are some problems within the relationship .

The poem portrays a series of oppositional ideas and how they can be reconciled with each other . The image of a beanfield is contrasted against the image of a lute while they are compared to the image of a coy woman being caressed and then resisting the caresses . This image is compounded with the coy woman being caressed compared to the innocence of Fricker . Nature is also seen in its oppositions , with a wildness within nature being contrasted with order within nature , especially in regards to the effects of an Aeolian harp and Coleridge 's pantheistic feelings about nature . In terms of religion , The Eolian Harp describes the mind 's desire to seek after the divine . Coleridge 's approach is similar to Ralph Cudworth 's in The True Intellectual System of the Universe . In the same theme , he wrote to John Thelwall in a letter dated 14 October 1797 @,@

I can at times feel strongly the beauties , you describe , in themselves & for themselves ? but more frequently all things appear little ? all knowledge , that can be acquired , child 's play ? the universe itself ? what but an immense heap of little things ? ? I can contemplate nothing but parts , & parts are all little ? ! ? My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great ? something one & indivisible ? and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls , mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty ! ? But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity !

The nature images connect back to desire and marriage , especially with an image like the myrtle tree that performs this function in many of Coleridge 's poems . However , Coleridge 's pantheistic feelings on nature are said to receive reproof from Fricker , and Coleridge returns to a more traditional view of God that deals more with faith than finding the divine within nature .