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and
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Akiko Sonoda

In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), Hazlitt regretted that Coleridge sacrificed the admiration of posterity which could have been promised to him by his writing, for the sake of a more immediate admiration of the listeners of his talk:

If Mr. Coleridge had not been the most impressive talker of his age, he would probably have been the finest writer; but he lays down his pen to make sure of an auditor, and mortgages the admiration of posterity for the stare of an idler.¹

Representing Coleridge as the "most impressive talker" of his age, Hazlitt criticized him as having wasted his unequalled genius and attainments through his talk which dissipated both his time and energy. Comparing Coleridge with William Godwin, Hazlitt lamented Coleridge's desultoriness in pursuing his objectives. While Godwin, who, in Hazlitt's opinion, was less gifted and with fewer attainments than Coleridge, concentrated his power and attention on his aims, and left more written works such as *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, thus securing him both a contemporary and a

future reputation; Coleridge, Hazlitt argued, had not left any written works which would have justified the high opinions that Coleridge's personal friends and acquaintances had of him, to the "world" and "posterity."² The world here means the contemporary, general reading public, who did not know Coleridge personally. Whereas his talk was clear and attracted the attention of his auditors, Hazlitt regretted that Coleridge had not achieved the same excellence in his writings, which he judged to be obscure and unreadable.³ Hazlitt concluded that at the root of Coleridge's extraordinary eloquence, there lay his irresistible desire to see an immediate, favourable response of his listeners. What Hazlitt lamented was that Coleridge's lack of foresight in endeavouring to acquire future readers by concentrating on the writings that would enable him to survive beyond the limitation of his contemporary period.

If we put aside the argument about whether Coleridge wasted his genius with his eloquence or not, Hazlitt is right in the respect that he has pointed out Coleridge's strong attachment to his contemporary audience. Although Hazlitt referred to Coleridge's listeners only in the word "audience," by "contemporary audience," I refer to his contemporaries including his readers, but not necessarily restricted to them. Coleridge was eager to reach audiences who understood and appreciated his works properly, no matter how few their numbers.⁴ Positive response from contemporary audience is what reassured him of his influential powers on a future audience as well. Although Hazlitt contrasted the admiration of posterity with the immediate praise of his listeners, Coleridge was deeply concerned with the permanent admiration of posterity as well as with the immediate appreciate recognition from his contemporaries.

A letter to his nephew Edward Coleridge (11th November, 1825), clearly shows this point. In this letter, which was written in the same

year as the publication of Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age*, Coleridge made clear that the two things—one writing for posterity, and the other to inspire the minds of a small number of contemporaries—were genuinely satisfying to him:

. . . the thought of writing for posterity alone and of benefiting my contemporaries by kindling and insemminating the minds of a few Individuals, as I have hitherto done in the *Nos non nobis* way of Conversation, would be pleasurable to me. I have not a single sparkle of the Love of literary Reputation for it's own sake.⁵

As he gave the example of conversation, at the first glance, it appears that Coleridge agreed with Hazlitt by admitting that he benefited his contemporaries only by conversation; however, grammatically, the word “benefiting” stands in apposition to “writing,” and this indicates that the way of “benefiting” his contemporaries is not restricted to conversation. With respect to posterity, his mode of communication was possible only through his writings, but with contemporaries, he could inspire them by lecturing, conversation, corresponding, as well as by writing. Although he referred to the fact that he had inspired the minds of a few contemporaries through conversation, it is given just as an exemplary mode of communication, and it is not that Coleridge excluded the influence of his written works to his contemporaries. He aimed to insemminate the minds of people by whatever modes of communication he adopted. As the word “insemminating” indicates, he wished for his influence to grow like a plant. Coleridge did not mention the relationship between these two undertakings for posterity and contemporaries here; but these two were in fact profoundly connected with his idea about how his permanent fame would be established.

As Andrew Bennett discussed in his *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, posthumous fame had particular significance for poets in the Romantic period. Posthumous fame is what ensures them eternal life, but it is often regarded as incompatible with their popularity and immediate reputation. Giving several exemplary statements made by such writers as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Hazlitt, and John Reynolds (poet and a close friend of Keats), Bennett listed "contemporary neglect" as one of the four necessary conditions for posthumous fame in their argument.⁶ As Bennett has pointed out, Romantic poets often asserted as if eternal "fame" was incompatible with contemporary popularity and reputation. The most representative example is Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Poems* (1815), which was written as a counterattack to reviewers, and rejected the judgment of contemporary reviewers in favour of a future readership.⁷ In this "Preface," Wordsworth affirmed that he would look for a fair judgment of his works by posterity, which meant antithetical readers to the "ignorant," "incapable" and "presumptuous" contemporary reviewers. Keats in a letter, critically stated that England produced many great writers because it unfailingly neglected them during their lifetime.⁸ There was a common tendency to regard contemporary appreciation as antithetical with posthumous fame.

Coleridge also assumed that fame is a thing which is judged posthumously, while reputation can be achieved during one's lifetime. In a letter to William Godwin, written in April 1808, Coleridge stated that "what Fame shall be your's or any one's, Posterity alone can realize, tho' the inward mind may foresee.—"⁹ But Coleridge differs slightly from Wordsworth's view expressed in the "Preface," in that he regarded contemporary reputation as not necessarily incompatible with "fame." In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge described the mentality of geniuses who, without regard to their contemporary reputation,

calmly awaited their fame: "In the inward assurance of permanent fame, they seem to have been either indifferent or resigned, with regard to immediate reputation."¹⁰ "Resignation" connotes a poor reception of an author's work, but "indifference" to immediate reputation does not necessarily imply public disapproval of a work. It merely expresses the author's transcendence of the question about the reception of his works. Although Bennett claimed that this passage is an unequivocal articulation about the incompatibility between contemporary reputation and future recognition,¹¹ I would propose that this statement shows that Coleridge did not consider them to be incompatible.

The reason why Coleridge attached importance to his contemporary audience was profoundly connected to his own idea of "fame." According to Coleridge "fame" is "a worthy object of pursuit for all men, and to seek it is even a solemn Duty for men endowed with more than ordinary powers of mind."¹² This is because Coleridge assumed that "fame" is a fate-like thing predestined by providence, and that to strive for "fame" by achieving permanent good and great things for one's fellow beings would be a service to God. In a notebook entry, Coleridge wrote: "By fame . . . I mean any thing rather than 'Reputation'—I mean, the desire of working on the good & great permanently, thro' indefinite ages—the struggle to be promoted into the rank of God's Fellow-Labourers."¹³ As "permanently" and "thro' indefinite ages" illustrate, the achievement which would lead a person to fame, should be beneficial to his contemporaries as well as to posterity.

The idea of viewing "fame" as fate is based on Coleridge's etymological analysis of this word. The word "fame" is derived from Latin "fatum" which means "fate" and "God's providence."¹⁴ Every time Coleridge gave this etymological explanation of "fame," he referred to

the etymology of "reputation" as well. Although both "reputation" and "fame" concern the reception of a work or an author, he drew a clear distinction between these concepts. Following the traditional idea that was expressed in the line in Milton's *Lycidas*: "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil," Coleridge basically assumed that fame belonged to posterity, while reputation was what could be acquired within one's lifetime.

While "fame" is derived from Latin which means "fate," "reputation" originates from "re-" which signifies "again" and "putare" which means "presume" and "surmise." On this ground, Coleridge explained that the word originally meant "the opinions of those who re-suppose the suppositions of others."¹⁵ This might have something to do with Coleridge's view as to the relationship between reviewing and the contemporary reputation of authors. In a letter written in 1831, Coleridge described reviewers as "the dispensers of contemporary reputation."¹⁶ In chapter three of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge stated: "I owe full two thirds of whatever reputation and publicity I happen to possess" to "anonymous critics" and "satirists with or without a name."¹⁷ Coleridge's complaint was directed against the fact that his public image was determined by reviews, magazines, and other forms of publication, not by his own writing. Whereas the average print runs of his works were five hundred copies per edition, which in most cases sold slowly over several years, influential reviews such as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Quarterly Review* boasted a circulations of more than ten thousand copies per issue.¹⁸ With this wide circulation, reviews printed in these magazines formed a public image, often prejudicial, of the works and the authors reviewed. In this respect, "reputation" is "the opinions of those who re-suppose the suppositions of others."¹⁹

Although Coleridge assumed "reputation" to be a "trifle" in

comparison with “fame,”²⁰ he also deemed that “reputation” has potentiality of evolving into “fame” by the judgment of successive generations. In a letter to John Murray, written in May 1816, Coleridge defined “fame” as “permanent reputation.”²¹ In a letter to Wordsworth written in 1808, Coleridge worried that the financial anxiety of the Wordsworth family might affect “if not your [=William Wordsworth’s] *fame*—yet your thereto introductory *reputation*.”²² In another letter to Southey written in July 1817, Coleridge introduced the German poet and novelist Ludwig Tieck, who wished to see Southey during his visit to England: “as a Poet, critic, and Moralist, he stands (in *reputation*) next to Goethe—& I believe, that this reputation will be *fame*.”²³ In a critical article on the Gothic tragedy *Bertram* which was published in the *Courier* of 29 August, 1816, Coleridge referred to “reputation” as what would be fixed into “fame” by “the agreeing suffrages of the good and wise in successive generations.”²⁴ In these statements, Coleridge expressed the idea that reputation would be a first step to fame, and reputation would be fixed into fame by the judgment of the “good and wise” in successive generations.

According to Coleridge’s idea, “fame” is predetermined by God’s providence; it should also, however, be consented to by “the good and wise” in successive generations. A passage in a letter to Lady Beaumont written in January 1810 illustrates the seemingly paradoxical nature of the determinants of “fame”:

FAME is truly the synonyme [sic] of *Fatum* . . .—the fate-like Sentence of the good & wise in a succession of generations, who inevitably decide the ultimate character of Works & actions, from the permanence of clear insight, and the fidelity of disinterested Love compared with the craving after

Novelty, and with those malignant Passions which are under an equal necessity of changing & varying their Objects.²⁵

Coleridge maintained that an achievement which had a permanent influence on the mind of all generations would be discriminated from ephemera which merely dazzled the public with their novelty by a continual judgment of "the good & wise in a succession of generations." "Fame" is a "fate-like" verdict, but, as far as it is agreed on by the public, it is not different from "reputation." It differs, however, in that fame is judged by "the good & wise in successive generations." The nature of this agent of judgment reveals two crucial characteristics of Coleridgean notions of fame. Firstly, it makes clear the reason why Coleridge believed that fame belonged to posterity. While reputation is a thing which can be established by an author's contemporaries alone, fame requires the judgment of infinite generations, starting from one's lifetime. Secondly, the rather abstract notion of "the good & wise" implies people with good "taste." Coleridge preferred to use the phrase "the good & wise" in describing people who themselves were preordained for tasks leading to "fame," but it is also their task to create a "good & wise" audience from whom they could expect genuine appraisal.

"Taste" was a crucial concept for Wordsworth and Coleridge. It was referred to in the "Advertisement" for the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Wordsworth stated: "An accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by severe thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition."²⁶ It is no exaggeration to say that their endeavour as professional men of letters was made for the creation of an appropriate taste (according to their judgment) among people. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explained

it as a discriminative faculty which could be gained as a result of the continuous exercise of one's intellectual power: "good taste must be *acquired*, and like all other good things, as the result of thought, and the submissive study of the best models."²⁷ In the same work, he also defined "taste" in creative activities as "a knowledge of the facts, material and spiritual, that most appertain to a writer's art, as if it have been governed and applied by *good sense*, and rendered instinctive by habit, becomes the representative and reward of our past conscious reasonings, insights, and conclusions."²⁸ Although taste becomes instinctive once it is acquired, this is a power gained as a result of the unremitting employment of a man's reason. As James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate have noted, Coleridge's notion of taste followed the late eighteenth-century concept of taste, which was formed as a reaction to a common earlier notion of it as based either on "reason" or "feeling."²⁹ "Taste" is a faculty which is gained as the result of the reconciliation of "reason" and "feeling."

Wordsworth's famous theory of taste, which was introduced as having been suggested by a "philosophical Friend," i.e. Coleridge, explicated the twofold tasks which geniuses who were destined to fame should fulfil. In the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," Wordsworth stated that "every author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so it has been, so will it continue to be."³⁰ Giving examples of Milton and Shakespeare not as a dramatist but as a poet, whom he represented as having met the initial neglect by contemporaries, Wordsworth explained the mechanism of the delayed appreciation of original works like Wordsworth's own poems. As he made it clear, initial neglect of the works of genius had its root in their originality itself. According to Wordsworth, genius is the person who does "what is worthy to be done, and what was never done before."³¹

Genius introduces “a new element into the intellectual universe,” and particularly genius in the field of fine arts broadens “the sphere of human sensibility, for the delight, honour, and benefit of human nature.”³² As they reveal untrodden fields to their contemporaries, their works tend to meet initial neglect or rejection according to the degree of their originality. The more original the works are, the more difficult it is to create a taste by which their works are to be appreciated.³³

Coleridge’s strong attachment to his contemporary audience has its foundation in his sense of duty to do as much good as he could to his contemporaries. Original geniuses should strive to fulfil their twofold duty, and should obtain only gradual recognition of their achievement. In a letter to Lady Beaumont, Coleridge explained that “Good men shy, and modest; and being satisfied with their own deep convictions they spread their opinions slowly and quietly, just where they chance to find openings of Sympathy.”³⁴ In *Biographia Literaria*, referring to William Leslie Bowles’s poetical works, which had a great influence on Coleridge as a young man, Coleridge stated: “it is particular to original genius to become less and less striking, in proportion to its success in improving the taste and judgement of its contemporaries.”³⁵ Wordsworth’s aim in “Essay, Supplementary” was also to encourage readers to reflect upon the influence of his poetry on the taste in the poetry in England since his first publication.³⁶ Wordsworth argued that various reactions—the “love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion, and even the contempt,” which the poems aroused among their readers contributed in the transformation of a particular “taste,” and ensured that he had not laboured in vain and further assured that his works would persist.³⁷

Fame is a fate and it is a duty for “men endowed with more than ordinary powers of mind” to pursue fame in Coleridgean conception;

but it is also a duty for them to secure contemporary reputation through his contribution in creating a taste with which their works could be enjoyed, because the reputation is the first step for fame, which is established by the judgment of the people of indefinite ages.

Notes

1. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, ed. E. D. Mackerness (1969; Plymouth: Northcote House, 1991) 55-56.
2. Hazlitt, 64.
3. Coleridge himself referred to this fact in a letter to William Collins written in December 1818: "... getting nothing by my publications, which I have not the power of making estimable by the public without loss of self-estimation, what can I do? ... And lecturing is the only means by which I can enable myself to go on at all with the great philosophical works to which the best and most genial hours of the last twenty years of my life have been devoted. Poetry is out of the question." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, vol.4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) 892-93. Hereafter abbreviated as *CL*.
4. For a detailed discussion, please refer to my essay "Coleridge and His Readers: Addressing the Learned" in *Kyushu Studies in English Literature* 20 (2003) 27-41.
5. *CL*, vol.5, 509.
6. Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 16-17. The four necessary conditions in the formulation of Romantic posterity proposed by Bennett are as follows:
(1) Romantic posterity involves the text-based survival of the self that writes;
(2) contemporary neglect is the necessary but not sufficient condition for posthumous survival; (3) living on, survival in posterity, amounts to an

adequate compensation for, or redemptive supplement of, life itself; (4) posterity is constitutive, in the sense that it not only redeems or functions as a substitute for the poet's life but is finally the condition of the possibility of the identity of the poet.

7. Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000) 473-74. The reason why Wordsworth added the "Preface" and "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" at the very last stage of the publication of the *Poems* (1815) was "to hit back at his critics," more specifically Francis Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review*, who had harshly attacked *The Excursion* (1814).
8. John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1958) 115
9. *CL*, vol.3, 87.
10. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 33. Hereafter cited as *BL*
11. Bennett, *Culture of Posterity*, 36.
12. *CL*, vol.3, 277. For the same claim by Coleridge, see *CL*, vol.3, 83-84 and vol.6, 541.
13. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol.3 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) entry 3291.
14. For this etymological explanation, see *CL*, vol.3, 277 and vol.6, 1026.
15. *CL*, vol.3, 277.
16. *CL*, vol.6, 876.
17. *BL*, vol.1, 48.
18. Coleridge himself referred to this difference in circulation in *BL*, vol.1, 61. For the information on the rapid growth in circulation of these two magazines, see A. S. Collins, *The Profession of Letters: A Study of the Relation of Author to Patron, Publisher and Public, 1780-1832* (1928 ; Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1973) 205 and 207.
19. *CL*, vol.3, 277. In a letter to John Hookman Frere, written in January 1826, Coleridge even wrote that "reputation" is "what that fool thinks . . .t'other

- fool thins over again." *CL*, vol.6, 541.
20. See for example, *CL*, vol.3, 277, and vol.6, 1026.
21. *CL*, vol. 4, 637.
22. *CL*, vol.3, 110.
23. *CL*, vol.4, 754.
24. *BL*, vol.2, 260.
25. *CL*, vol3., 277-78.
26. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, note by Michael Schmidt (London: Penguin, 1999) vi.
27. *BL*, vol.2, 34.
28. *BL*, vol.2, 81.
29. *BL*, vol.2, 82.
30. William Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (1904: Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936) 750.
31. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, 750.
32. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, 750.
33. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, 750.
34. *CL*, vol.3, 278.
35. *BL*, vol.1, 24.
36. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, 749.
37. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, 749-50.