The Nowhere Man and Mother Nature's Son: Collaboration and Resentment in the *Lyrical Ballads* and the Beatles

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Thirty-five years have passed since an English vicar half-seriously blessed his nation's obsession with a music group called the Beatles by requesting that the quartet record "O Come All Ye Faithful, Yeah Yeah Yeah" for his Christmas congregation (Norman 182). Two hundred years have passed since a provincial bookseller unwittingly effected a revolution in the form and function of English poetry by publishing a slim volume of "experimental" poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads*. At first glance, the Beatles and *Lyrical Ballads* would seem to have little in common. The former were arguably the most famous entertainment celebrities in world history, the latter a book of verse now encountered almost solely in college English courses. Yet both were hugely influential, and behind both was an uncannily similar set of parallel lives. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the obscure poets who composed the *Lyrical Ballads,* like Paul McCartney and John Lennon, the creative core of the Beatles, saw their friendship and common artistic aspirations ultimately shattered by disagreements surrounding (among other things) money and drugs. Though frequently represented as collaborators, all (for the most part) composed independently, turning to the other only for occasional assistance or criticism. And for both pairs the loss of the other's companionship was artistically crippling. When they were in daily contact with one another, the Wordsworth/Coleridge and Lennon/McCartney teams produced groundbreaking, fresh, and vital work. But the compositions that came out of their eagerly-sought solo careers couldn't approach the revolutionary vigor of what they achieved together. For both pairs, the team's creativity was immeasurably greater than the sum of its parts.

The truism that Romanticism is a game for the young is often trotted out to explain

sad spectacles such as Wordsworth's poetic decline after 1807 and the thoroughgoing banality of the voluminous work Lennon and McCartney did after the Beatles broke up in 1970. The conventionality, political conservatism, and religious orthodoxy that age typically brings, it is said, dull Romanticism's cutting edge. Wordsworth's burnout in particular has been the subject of several articles and at least one book-length study;(1) but none of these takes sufficient notice of the fact that the lyric muse and Coleridge left Wordsworth at almost exactly the same time. This is conventionally seen as a temporal coincidence; but that something remarkably similar happened to another famous pair of competitive collaborators–whose relationship in many respects mirrored that between Wordsworth and Coleridge–some 170 years later hints at the presence of an abiding psychological or existential pattern that underlies lyric excellence, a pattern that generative anthropology is uniquely capable of discerning.

Like that of their precursors Coleridge and Wordsworth, the creativity of John Lennon and Paul McCartney was fueled by mimetic fascination and resentment. Behind lyric, as Eric Gans has written, is "the ever-present possibility of asserting the significance of one's own individuality" (*End of Culture* 273). Collaboration helps lyric aspirants like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lennon, and McCartney realize this all-important possibility, since for each, the opposite temperament of the other serves as both a goad to greatness and a source of ontic and aesthetic completion. In effect, each says to himself, "My lyric vision will be enriched to the degree I can absorb and reconfigure on my own aesthetic terms the opposite worldview of my partner." To his partner, each becomes an object of what René Girard calls "metaphysical desire," giving lyric collaboration the characteristic shape of the classic tragic agon. At first, a "model of otherness" is useful because it provides a contrasting background against which the unique aspects of the self stand out more clearly. But when implications of dependency–as they must–begin to creep into this relationship, resentment flares up, turning the beneficial "model of otherness" into an obstacle to self-fulfillment. Eventually this resentment builds to intolerable levels, and breaks out into the kind of open conflict that is inevitably fatal to continued partnership. But separating from the partner, which appears to each collaborator as the natural path to self-realization, leads to aesthetic complacency. Romantic fervor fades not because aesthetic, personal, and political radicals lose their edginess as they age, but because the mimetic struggles that lie hidden beneath Romanticism's myths of the parthenogenesis of the imagination cannot continue indefinitely. When the Romantic revolts against his collaborator, he cuts himself off from his most reliable and powerful source of creative inspiration.

2

That the Wordsworth-Coleridge relationship recurs in Lennon and McCartney–who

between them wrote more than 160 songs for the Beatles–shows that, despite claims that we live in the “postmodern” age, our popular culture remains unapologetically Romantic. Lennon and McCartney are the English lyric poets whose untutored language, formal experimentalism, rebellious image, and persistent return in their songs to the personal–by exploring love, childhood, and memory–transformed pop music from polite entertainment into our era’s dominant medium for the establishment of a poetic individuality. Like Lennon and McCartney, today’s pop stars present themselves as poets in the making; and our poetically-inclined young men and women no longer retire into solitude with pen and paper, but pick up guitars (descendants of the lyre), and pour out their private thoughts and feelings in song for the patrons of coffee bars and nightclubs. Lennon and McCartney inherited this poetic mode from Wordsworth and Coleridge and established it as the model of current poetic practice; the Beatles’ astonishing longevity in the public eye testifies to the world’s willingness to honor them as the founders of contemporary literary culture. Nearly thirty years after they split up, and nearly twenty years after the death of their founder forever foreclosed the possibility of a reunion, the world still cannot get enough of the Beatles. In 1993, twenty-five years after its composition, “Yesterday” became the world’s most popular song, having been played on U.S. radio more than 6 million times. A two-CD set of previously unreleased radio performances, *The Beatles Live at the BBC*, debuted at number three on the charts when it came out in December 1994. In the fall of 1995, another two-CD set of previously uncollected material–rehearsals, outtakes, demos, and live performances–was released, timed to accompany the 6-hour documentary “The Beatles Anthology” broadcast during Thanksgiving week on ABC television. It sold 450,000 copies on its first day, the most single-day sales ever for an album, and threatened for a time (though it eventually did not) to break the single-week sales record of 950,000 set by Pearl Jam in 1993. The combined total sales of volumes 1-3 of *The Beatles Anthology* eventually reached more than 20 million, with more than 40% of those records purchased by teenagers–that is, people who were born at least ten years after the group broke up. Beatle-related tourism now generates nearly $100 million annually for their hometown of Liverpool.(2)

The world still loves the Beatles, but the Beatles did not love each other. Through the eleven years of the group’s existence, however, the group managed to hide their personal feuds and fallings-out, presenting a remarkably cheerful and harmonious public image, in which each individual presented a distinct identity while remaining unmistakably “a Beatle.” Many of the early published attempts to account for the hysteria that followed the group wherever they went attributed their appeal to this harmony, a concept which was stretched to include both the group’s music and its unique blend of personalities. Beatle songs, wrote the London *Times*‘ music critic, give one “the impression that they think simultaneously of harmony

and melody, so firmly are the major tonic sevenths and ninths built into their tunes, and the flat submediant key switches. . . (27 December 1963). This compliment was lost on the Beatles, since none could read music; but the critic was, in his way, right: the naturally complex harmonies both originated in and expressed the group's winsome array of human types. There was George, the quiet one, Ringo, the cuddly one, and, at the band's creative core, John and Paul, whose vocal harmony, writes Philip Norman, "derived its freshness and energy from the contest being waged within it" (257). The history of both the Beatles' rise to worldwide superstardom and their bitter disintegration some six years later is the story of how that extraordinary harmony was insufficient to withstand the inevitably divergent tendencies of its constituent tones.

Paul McCartney met John Lennon in July, 1957, when he went to hear John's band, The Quarry Men, play for the annual St. Peter's parish church summer carnival in the Liverpool suburb of Woolton. They became friends almost immediately, in spite of, or perhaps because of, their opposite personalities. "No two temperaments," says Philip Norman, "could have been more unalike. John, dour and blisteringly direct, fought against authority and inhibition in any form. Paul, baby-faced and virtuous, hated to be on anybody's wrong side" (45). These thoroughgoing differences are nowhere more pronounced than in their songs. As novice performers dreaming of fame, Lennon and McCartney agreed early on that any song written by either of them would carry both their names. Putting "Words and Music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney" on all their songs was the pair's way of arrogating to themselves, while still schoolboys, the panache of great songwriting teams like George and Ira Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, and Gilbert and Sullivan. But Lennon and McCartney only rarely actually collaborated.(3) Each composed his songs independently, the other occasionally providing assistance or suggestions for improvement of the "middle eight." The effect each had on the other was thus more the result of indirect temperamental influence than resolute artistic cooperation, the result of which was a balance all the more appealing for its fragility: "[a] song would be John's aggression held in check by Paul's decorum; it would be Paul's occasionally cloying sentiment cut back by John's unmerciful cynicism" (Norman 257).

Lennon's and McCartney's individual temperaments began to manifest themselves more openly in 1965, particularly in the music they wrote for the film *Help!* The title song, written by Lennon, as well as "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away" and "Ticket to Ride," hint at the Byronic world-weariness and melancholy which would within the next year and a half evolve into his controversial fascination with marginal states of consciousness and "experimental" modes of musical composition, which reached their zenith in the conceptual art piece "Revolution 9." McCartney's optimistic and upbeat contributions to the score, especially "Another

Girl” and “The Night Before,” on the other hand, show a lyric and melodic cheerfulness absent in even the sunniest of his earlier tunes, and which would reach its zenith in post-Beatle pop hits like “Silly Love Songs” (1976).

3

These differences became increasingly pronounced in work produced after the summer of 1966, when the group gave its last public performance. No longer subjected to the other’s constant presence by the stifling propinquity of tour buses, airplanes, and dressing rooms, Lennon and McCartney felt freer to explore their individual lyric visions. The culmination of this divergence was *Beatles ’68*, better known as the White Album, the glaring inconsistencies of which showed that what had been in the early years a creative contest was now a “war” (Norman 257). Alternating with Lennon’s evocations of black despair, as in “I’m So Tired” and “Yer Blues” were McCartney’s mawkish love songs and hymns to domestic happiness, such as “I Will,” “Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da,” and “Martha My Dear,” which he wrote to his sheepdog. So long as the Beatles were together in some form, it seemed, their harmony was capable of reasserting itself, as it did on their final album,*Abbey Road*. When, however, the war between Lennon and McCartney moved from the recording studio to the corporate boardroom, the group broke up.(4)

Temperamentally and poetically, Lennon is to McCartney as Coleridge is to Wordsworth: John’s cynical melancholy is the ground against which Paul composed his optimistically buoyant figures, as can be seen in some representative lyrics. Lennon’s “Yer Blues,” like Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode,” evokes the paralysis of intellectual and moral despair to which persons of their shared disposition seem to have been prone:

> Black cloud crossed my mind;
> Blue mist round my soul;
> Feel so suicidal,
> Even hate my rock and roll!
> Wanna die, yeah, wanna die;
> If I ain’t dead already,
> Ooh girl you know the reason why.(*Beatles Complete* 394-395)

Compare this passage from Coleridge’s lovesick ode to Sara Hutchinson, the woman (and William Wordsworth’s sister-in-law) for whom he had conceived an extra-marital passion:

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief
In word, or sigh, or tear–

(*Poetry and Prose* 116)

Even that aspect of Lennon's later Beatles work for which he became most infamous–his attempts to depict musically his drug-induced hallucinations–has its Coleridgian antecedents. "Kubla Khan," which Coleridge claimed came to him in a dream he had after taking "an anodyne," follows the course of a river "five miles meandering" from a "stately pleasure dome" to "a lifeless ocean" (64). In "Tomorrow Never Knows" (1966), Lennon urges his auditor to "turn off your mind, relax and float downstream" and "play the game 'Existence' to the end of the beginning" (*Beatles* 246-247); and in "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" (1967), he invites his listener to "picture yourself on a boat on a river, with tangerine trees and marmalade skies" (287).

The pairing works equally well in the case of Wordsworth and McCartney. Consider "Mother Nature's Son":

Born a poor young country boy–Mother Nature's son
All day long I'm sitting singing songs for everyone.
Sit beside a mountain stream–see her waters rise
Listen to the pretty sound of music as she flies.
Find me in my field of grass–Mother Nature's son
Swaying daisies sing a lazy song beneath the sun.

(*Beatles* 376)

This lyric's Wordsworthian feel is unmistakable, and seems, if not specifically, at least incidentally to recall the famous "I wandered lonely as a cloud":

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

(*Poetical Works* 311)

At first, temperamentally opposed styles like these appear happily to complement each other, to harmonize through their equal attention to both sides of the post-Kantian world's depiction of phenomena as the result of creative conflict between categorical opposites–as in Blake's "innocence and experience." When the innocence of Wordsworth/McCartney encounters the experience of Coleridge/Lennon, the comprehensiveness of each's vision is increased through the labor of coming to terms (as much as possible) with the opposing view of the other. At its best, this process yields a complex and subtle dialogue, like that between "Tintern Abbey" and "Frost at Midnight," both written in 1798, when the friendship between Wordsworth and Coleridge was strongest and the two were in almost daily contact. Both lyrics place the speaker in a situation in which a present perception awakes a significant memory. Revisiting the Wye River valley in Wales after an absence of five years, Wordsworth's sight of "steep and lofty cliffs" reminds him of how often he has derived from the memory of this landscape "sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart, / And passing even into my purer mind, / With tranquil restoration" (*Lyrical Ballads* 209). Alone in his cottage on a silent winter night, Coleridge's sight of a fluttering ash on the fireplace grate returns him to his school days when, "pent 'mid cloisters dim," he had longed for a visit from a "townsman, aunt, or *sister* more beloved" to interrupt the habitual gloom of his life in "the great city" (*Poetry and Prose* 75). Most important, though, both poems obliquely homage the temperamental keynote of the other. Wordsworth's celebration in "Tintern Abbey" of the restorative powers of imagination and nature is tinged with a Coleridgian melancholy and skepticism about the final reliability of the human sensorium. "The picture of the mind revives again," says Wordsworth, but with "somewhat of a sad perplexity" (211). Coleridge's imaginary revival of the sadness of his city-bound childhood concludes with an uncharacteristically optimistic apostrophe to the infant son lying cradled at his side: "But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags / Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds" (75).

Much of the power of these lyrics–like the best Beatle songs–comes from this

blending of contrasting voices, or the harmony that can result from the struggle to assimilate an opposite point of view. That struggle carries with it, however, a tragic countertendency. Instead of reinforcing the need for a continuation of the subtle dialogue that brought them into being, magnificent successes like “Tintern Abbey,” “Frost at Midnight” convince their creators of their artistic self-sufficiency. This is especially true for self-assured poets like Wordsworth and McCartney. However valuable Coleridge’s temperamental differences were in bringing his poetic distinctiveness into sharper relief, Wordsworth eventually felt the need to disengage even from implicit dialogue with the Coleridgian sensibility. In this regard Lennon and McCartney both resembled Wordsworth, for as their songwriting became more self-consciously poetic, they felt increasingly limited rather than liberated by their artistic and temperamental differences. This is shown by the struggle that developed between Wordsworth and Coleridge over the publication in the second and subsequent editions of *Lyrical Ballads* of what has become one of the best-known and most widely reprinted English poems: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Wordsworth and Coleridge originally conceived of *Lyrical Ballads* as a moneymaking scheme: needing a little cash to finance a walking tour to the Valley of Stones, a late eighteenth-century tourist destination in western England, they thought they might co-write a few poems for publication in magazines. But the more they cogitated the notion of writing together, the more serious and systematic the project became, until, as Coleridge wrote in *Biographia Literaria* (1815):

> The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves (168).

5

It fell to Coleridge, the nowhere man, to write the first class of poems, and to Wordsworth, mother nature’s son, to write the second class. Coleridge wrote four poems and Wordsworth nineteen; but the most memorable and momentous of

Coleridge's works "directed to persons and characters supernatural" was *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the pseudo-medieval tale of a sailor haunted by the ghostly consequences of his thoughtless killing of an albatross.

For the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, which was published anonymously, Wordsworth wrote a brief introductory "Advertisement" in which he carefully avoided suggesting that the collection was the product of two poets. After highlighting his own poems "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "The Thorn," and "Expostulation and Reply," Wordsworth wrote that "THE RIME OF THE ANCYENT MARINER was professedly written in imitation of the *style* as well as of the spirit of the elder poets," as if this Coleridge composition had been produced by the same hand.(5) Of the first edition's approximately three thousand lines of verse, about one third was written by Coleridge, and *Ancient Mariner* occupied the pole position in the collection, which sold out in about a year. For the two-volume second edition, however, Wordsworth wrote all the additional poems, and his name–not Coleridge's–appeared on the title page as the author. Moreover, *Ancient Mariner* was moved from the first position to near the end of volume I. Wordsworth also appended a note to this edition only, in which he distanced himself from *Ancient Mariner*, claiming that he had agreed to reprint the poem against the wishes of the still unnamed "Author," who, because of his "knowledge that many persons had been much displeased with it," had expressed his wish that the *Ancient Mariner* be "suppressed" (*Lyrical Ballads* 39). "The Poem of my Friend has indeed great defects," wrote Wordsworth, but because it also was graced with "many delicate touches of passion," some "beautiful images," and "an unusual felicity of language," he had been able to prevail upon this "Friend" to permit him to republish it.

Wordsworth's ostensible reason for including this note–which appeared only in the 1800 edition–was his impression that *Ancient Mariner*'s prominence of place in the first edition had hurt sales (an odd conclusion, since the edition had sold out). On 24 June 1799, he wrote to his publisher:

> You tell me the poems have not sold ill If it is possible, I should wish to know *what number* have been sold. From what I can gather it seems that The Ancyent Marinere has upon the whole been an injury to the volume, I mean that the old words and the strangeness of it have deterred readers from going on. If the volume should come to a second edition I would put in its place some little things which would be more likely to suit the common taste (*Early Letters* 226-227).

This anxiety to "suit the common taste" belies the confidence of Wordsworth's

declaration in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* that the poems would "create the taste by which they were to be enjoyed." But Wordsworth's growing discomfort with the *Ancient Mariner* did not really arise from the supposedly off-putting "strangeness" of its language. Rather, its theme and tone jarred with what Wordsworth increasingly saw as the consistency of "his" *Lyrical Ballads*. This was the reason for his decision to excise *Christabel*, another mock-medieval tale of the supernatural that Coleridge wanted to include–unfinished, as if it were discovered in fragment form–in the second edition. "It is my wish and determination that (whatever the expence may be, which I hereby take upon myself) such Pages of the Poem of Christabel as have been printed. . .be cancelled," Wordsworth wrote his publisher in early 1800. "I mean to have other poems substituted." His reason for this request was straightforward: the "Style of this Poem was so discordant from my own that it could not be printed along with my poems with any propriety" (quoted in Gill 187).

In fairness, it must be granted that readers of the *Lyrical Ballads* faced a substantial challenge in having to negotiate the tonal shift from *Ancient Mariner*'s depiction of "Life-in-Death" steering a ghost ship crewed by reanimated dead sailors to Wordsworth's

> It is the first mild day of March
> Each minute sweeter than before
> The red-breast sings from the tall larch
> That stands beside our door.
>
> (*Poetical Works*, 82)

Beatle fans face a similar challenge from the drastic mood swings of the White Album, which ranges from the Wordsworthian sweetness of McCartney's "Martha My Dear" to the Coleridgian weirdness of Lennon's "Revolution 9." But Wordsworth's attempts to muscle Coleridge out of *Lyrical Ballads* stem from more than just their aesthetic differences. As Wordsworth's confidence in his voice grew, the temperamental dichotomy that had initially stimulated him changed into a source of annoyance. No doubt Coleridge's tendency to fawn on Wordsworth's superior poetic powers exacerbated this tendency. From the start, their outwardly mutual admiration had in fact been uneven: "Wordsworth is a very great man," wrote Coleridge shortly after they met, "the only man to whom *at all times* & in all *modes of excellence* I feel myself inferior" (letter to Robert Southey, quoted in Gill 143). In late 1800 he wrote to Francis Wrangham that Wordsworth "is a great, a true Poet–I am only a kind of a Metaphysician" (*Letters* I 698). By the turn of the century Coleridge effectively conceded victory to his collaborator/opponent, telling William

Godwin in 1801 that “The Poet is dead in me” (quoted in Gill 200).

6

But this supposedly dead writer would be pricked into composing verse one more time by his rival before lapsing into poetic silence for good. In 1805, Coleridge, his opium addiction worsening and his domestic life a shambles, traveled to the Mediterranean to get away from his family and try to recover his health. This proved a vain effort, and after two years he returned to the Lake District. During his absence, Coleridge found, Wordsworth had completed the long autobiographical poem he had been contemplating since 1799: the *Prelude*. Over the course of several evenings, Wordsworth read the poem to Coleridge, who was moved by the experience to respond with a poem of his own. In “To William Wordsworth,” tellingly subtitled “Composed on the night after his recitation of a poem on the growth of an *individual* mind” (italics mine), Coleridge describes with touching honesty the confusion of elation and self-castigation roused in him by Wordsworth’s achievement:

> Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
> The pulses of my being beat anew:
> And even as life returns upon the drowned,
> Life’s joy rekindling roused a throng of pains–
> Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
> Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
> And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;
> And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
> Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,
> And Genius given, and Knowledge won in vain.
>
> (*Poetry and Prose* 86)

Here “Frost at Midnight”‘s “cradled infant”–a Wordsworthian child that is father to the man–wakes from his peaceful sleep, and will not be comforted. However he might have intended them, it is difficult to miss what must have struck Coleridge as the cruelty of Wordsworth’s actions: the “great poet” welcomes his one-time soul mate back to a cherished home and hearth with some seven thousand lines on the “individual mind.” Wordsworth’s most momentous act of poetic self-definition to date repeated the callous expulsion of Coleridge first accomplished by ridding the *Lyrical Ballads* of the “discordant” *Christabel* and *Ancient Mariner*.

If this gesture’s aim was to purify Wordsworth’s lyric voice by purging its

Coleridgian discordancies, it sadly missed the mark: by expelling the internalized Coleridge Wordsworth dried up the most vital wellspring of his creativity. By the end of 1807, Coleridge had left the Lake District for good, and Wordsworth began a poetic decline that continued until his death in 1850. Though he achieved a modicum of popular success with the publication of *The Excursion* in 1814, his reputation among his Victorian admirers and today's readers has relied almost entirely on verse written between 1797 and 1807, not coincidentally the period of his greatest intimacy–and struggle–with Coleridge. This decline in poetic power is generally viewed as an unfortunate but necessary product of age–like all of us, as Wordsworth got older, he lost his youthful creative fire, and settled into an easy conventionality and conservatism. While there can be little doubt that this played some role in the decline, the contemporaneous departure of Coleridge and poetry suggests that on some level, Wordsworth's struggle with his "realizing opposition"–his resentment–was the key to his lyric excellence. But by giving in to that resentment, and ridding himself of what increasingly appeared to be Coleridge's ontological obstacles to self-realization, Wordsworth unwittingly invited what Thomas De Quincey called this poet's "extreme, intense, unparalleled *onesidedness*" (190) to hold unchecked sway over his life and works. The absence of Coleridge as a "model of otherness" severely vitiated Wordsworth's lyric powers: no amount of interpretive ingenuity can uncover in the "Duddon River Sonnets" the undeniable power of the "Lucy" poems or the "Intimations" ode. Coleridge made "Tintern Abbey" possible, just as Lennon made McCartney's "Yesterday" (the most recorded song in the history of popular music) possible. In both cases, friction against the other honed disparateness into an energetic harmony.

In the early 1970s Mick Jagger was asked whether his band would ever break up. He replied that, like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones would probably disband someday, but when they did he hoped they wouldn't be "quite so bitchy about it" (Brown and Gaines 345). In their solo recordings of the first few post-Beatle years, McCartney and Lennon traded musical recriminations and insults with much of the energy and wit that had initially contributed so vitally to their popularity. "Dear Boy, I hope you never know how much you miss [me]," sang Paul to John on *Ram* (1970). "The sound you make is Muzak in my ears," replied John on *Imagine* (1971). As their mimetic fascination with each other lessened through the mid and late seventies, the one-sidedness of both Lennon and McCartney became more pronounced: Paul turned more commercial, releasing several disco-inflected hits, and John took a five-year hiatus from recording before coming out with the disappointing *Double Fantasy* shortly before his death in 1980. In 1810 Coleridge learned that Wordsworth had denounced him to a mutual friend as an "absolute nuisance" and a "rotten drunkard" (Gill 288). To his notebook Coleridge confided an anguished response, recalling how "fourteen years" of "reverential admiration" for Wordsworth, had cost him his "own literary reputation," and resulted in his passing "among those, who

were most disposed to think highly of me, for a deluded Fanatic on account of my firmness in maintaining and my vehemence and enthusiasm in displaying, the moral & intellectual Superiority of my Friend" (*Notebooks* 4006). Like that of his last great poem, this apostrophe's poignancy derives from the deeply conflicted feelings that Wordsworth aroused in Coleridge: a paralyzing convolution of resentment and self-recrimination, that, paradoxically, produced some of his most moving poetic language. This leads to a counterintuitive conclusion: lyric, exalted by post-Romantic culture as the best available means of manifesting a self-sufficient individuality, thrives on resentment. Lyric is the product of a struggle with an *other*; but, *contra* Harold Bloom and Emmanuel Levinas, that other is not necessarily a long-dead literary precursor or an ideal being into whom you cast all your fears and self-doubts. He may be the man living in the cottage over the hill, with whom you tramp through the woods talking philosophy, or he may be the man on the other side of the stage, who wears the same suit and the same haircut that you do. Their resentful flights from a consciousness of artistic and existential indebtedness to their realizing opposition blinded Coleridge, Lennon, McCartney, and especially Wordsworth to the literary necessity of resentment.

7

Notes

1. See, for example, Carson C. Hamilton, *Wordsworth's Decline in Poetic Power: Prophet into High Priest* (New York: Exposition Press, 1963).(back)

2. *U.S. News and World Report*, March 3, 1997.(back)

3. After a John Lennon composition, "Please Please Me," went to number one on the British charts in early 1963, Lennon and McCartney wrote three songs–all of which were smash hits–together: "From Me to You," "She Loves You," and "I Want to Hold Your Hand." After the last of these, however, there were no true 50-50 collaborations between the two.(back)

4. Beatles legend holds that the much-vilified Yoko Ono, whom Lennon met in 1967, broke up the Beatles by "coming between" John and Paul. Ironically, however, the disintegration of the group (though a long time coming) was precipitated by mistrust between the group's two major players that resulted from Sir Lew Grade's attempt at a hostile takeover of Lennon and McCartney's music publishing company in 1968. Though Grade's attempt failed, Lennon learned during strategy meetings that McCartney had behind his partner's back purchased what amounted to a controlling interest in the corporation (Northern Songs, Ltd.). Lennon formed the Plastic Ono Band in the Spring of 1969–which "officially" disbanded the Beatles–because he felt he could no longer trust McCartney concerning the band's

business dealings. See Peter Brown and Steven Gaines, *The Love You Make*, especially pages 312-315 and 369-371.(back)

5. In Chapter 14 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge claimed sole authorship of "The Ancient Mariner." *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. D. and S. Coleridge (1852), tells a slightly different story, however. A reprinted letter from the Rev. Alexander Dyce to Hartley Coleridge tells of meeting Wordsworth, who stated that "'The Ancient Mariner' was founded on a strange dream, which a friend of Coleridge had, who fancied he saw a skeleton ship, with figures in it. We had both determined to write some poetry for a monthly magazine, the profits of which were to defray the expenses of a little excursion we were to make together. 'The Ancient Mariner' was intended for this periodical, but was too long. I had very little share in the composition of it, for I soon found that the style of Coleridge and myself would not assimilate. Besides the lines (in the fourth part),

> 'And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
> As is the ribbed sea-sand,'
> I wrote the stanza (in the first part),
> 'He holds him with his glittering eye
> –The wedding guest stood still,
> And listens like a three-years' child:
> The Mariner hath his will,'

and four or five lines more in different parts of the poem, which I could not now point out. The idea of '*shooting an albatross' was mine; for I had been reading* Shelvlocke's Voyages, *which probably Coleridge never saw*. I also suggested the reanimation of the dead bodies, to work the ship" (quoted in *Lyrical Ballads* 367-368).(back)

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