"I Seek the Cottag'd Dell:" The Birth, Life, and Death of Coleridge's American Pantisocracy

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In his article, "Imaginary Voyages and the Romantic Imagination," Dr. Paul Longley Arthur of the University of Queensland remarks: "Imaginary voyages can …be read as an important but neglected manifestation of romantic principles in literature…Their imaginative visions of far-away and unknown places gave to them an imaginative reach which exceeded the traditional domain and dimensions of conventional eighteenth century romance forms" (1). Samuel Taylor Coleridge has taken his readers on such journeys of the imagination. Poems like "Kubla Kahn" and "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" transport their reader into untraversed dimensions of time and space. In 1794, Coleridge, inspired by the French Revolution, planned to embark on a voyage to America: a journey in which his awakened principles for equality and justice would be manifested in the establishment of a new society. This new way to live, referred to both in principal and practice as Pantisocracy, meaning "rule by all who are all equal", is a place where men and women would be absolutely free from all forms of oppression and share in equal ownership of land and material goods. Coleridge's quest for the Pantisocracy, a search for a "cottag'd dell" as described in the poem "Pantisocracy," would become an overarching theme in both the life and work of Coleridge from 1794-1796. During this time, several poems reflect Coleridge's belief that this utopian way of life would lead to complete domestic happiness and would offer a practical way to relieve the difficulties of humanity's present situation. Carl R. Woodring, author of Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge, agrees that the search for a life filled with "bucolic bliss" was an important theme in Coleridge's poetry composed during this time (63). Like other visionaries, the poet believed that humanity needed a new beginning. Allan Grant writes in A Preface to Coleridge about this mythical longing:

> Events of our time bear witness to the continued vitality of the myth of the 'American dream.' Columbus, as much as the Pilgrim Fathers of the leaders of the revolutionary [sic] War of Independence, was aware of the fundamentally religious significance of the discovery of a new land. Each restatement of the myth has been accompanied by the conviction that the old world has now become irredeemably corrupted and materialistic. Pantisocracy is just such a response and an attempt at the renewal of the shared life on a religious basis (51).

Critics often state that Coleridge's Cambridge meeting with Robert Southey in the late summer of 1794 gave birth to the Pantisocracy scheme; however, Dr. W.A. Speck, Southey scholar at the University of Northumbria, believes that the seeds of Coleridge's idealistic society were planted in the year preceding this meeting. Speck believes that by early 1793, Coleridge was disillusioned by the violent turn taken by the French Revolutionists and Pitt's crackdown on suspicious liberals considered to have "dangerous alliances" with the French anarchists. Letters written to Grosvenor Bedford document the philosophical angst the poet was experiencing. He wrote on November 8, 1793 upon hearing the news of continuing murder and suppression in Europe:

> I am sick of this world and with everyone in it. The murder of Brissot has completely harrowed up my faculties and I begin to believe that virtue can only aspire to content in obscurity, for happiness is out of the question. I look around the world and everywhere find the same mournful spectacle. The strong tyrannise over the weak - man and beast. The same depravity pervades the whole creation. Oppression is triumphant everywhere and the only difference is that it acts in

> Turkey thro' the organ of a Grand Signior, in France of a Revolutionary Tribunal and in England of a prime minister (qtd. in Speck 2).

Coleridge's bleak attitude seems to take a positive turn a week later when he made an exception to his observation in a subsequent letter to Bedford:

> It was the favorite intention of Cowley to retire to a cottage in America and seek happiness in solitude which he could not find in society… I should be pleased to reside in a country where mere abilities would ensure respect, where society was upon a proper footing and man was considered more valuable than money, and where I could till the earth and provide, by honest industry, the meal which my wife would dress with pleasing care (Qtd. in Speck 3).

Speck also notes Coleridge's fascination with William Godwin's Political Justice, which he read with great enthusiasm shortly after its publication in October 1793. Under the influence of the Rousseau's naturalistic philosophies, Godwin believed that systems like the English monarchy and the stratification of English aristocracy had corrupted humankind. Political Justice had several major points. First, he believed that if people could be taught, through reason, that uneglitarian and violent behavior was counterproductive, then men and women could become capable of human perfection (4). Secondly, Speck notes that Godwin:

> "…preached that a small community, no bigger than a parish, was a more congenial environment in which to strive for perfectibility than a large city, or worse still a nation. In a face - to - face society, individuals could be educated to realize that allowing their passions rather than their reason to rule them was destructive to self as well as to social fulfillment. The few who refused to curb their irrational impulses would have their behavior controlled by the majority (4).

In fact, Coleridge was so taken with Godwin that he composed a poem to laud the author in January of 1795. He wrote in "To William Godwin, Author of 'Political Justice:"'

> Nor will I not thy holy guidance bless,
> And hymn thee, GODWIN! with an ardent lay;
> For that thy voice, in Passion's stormy day,
> When wild I roam'd the bleak Heath of Distress,
> Bade the bright form of Justice meet my way —
> And told me that her name was HAPPINESS (9-14).

In this salute, Coleridge recognizes the influence that Godwin had on him during a time of confusion following the outcome of the French Revolution. If Godwin's ideas could be put into practice, surely domestic tranquility would not be far away. Additionally, Speck believes that Rousseau as well as other French philosophers of the time heavily influenced Coleridge. He states, "Such philosophical observations doubtlessly informed Coleridge's thinking on the utopian aspects of the scheme to emigrate to America which was to be called Pantisocracy" (5).

Although Coleridge's American dream never physically materialized, the Pantisocratic scheme was born out of the best of intentions. He and Oxford fellow Robert Southey, young and idealistic undergraduates, longed for equality and justice for all people. Although polar opposites in appearance in manner and appearance, the men developed a partnership that became the crucible in which Pantisocracy came to life. John Charpentier remarks in Coleridge, the Sublime Somnambulist that:

> These two, utterly different in temperament and mind, complemented and charmed each other in the most astonishing way…Southey's uncompromising republicanism, his fanatical love of virtue, inspired by Rousseau, and reinforced

> by the Stoics, his way of underpinning his opinions with fixed principles, impressed Coleridge form the very first by their virility. As he listened to Southey laying down the law, his own diffuse ideas seemed to acquire a certain body. Through the gaps which Southey neatly cut in the tangle of ideas Coleridge brought him, Coleridge in turn revealed to Southey horizons stretching to infinity. He lifted him out of himself, and, as a letter Southey wrote …goes to prove, Coleridge game him a feeling for the sublime, by converting him to his philosophy, and by initiating him into his own religious understanding of the world (64-65).

Like many successful partnerships, Southey and Coleridge, for a time, worked together by respecting the differences between themselves and played on one another's strengths. The product of their relationship was the Pantisocracy scheme. The two men quickly developed the specifics of the planned colony. Thomas Poole, a mutual friend of both men and an advocate of the utopian dream, detailed the scheme in a letter directed to an individual who had expressed interest in joining the group:

> Twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles are to embark with twelve ladies in April next. Previous to their leaving this country they are to have as much intercourse as possible, in order to ascertain each other's dispositions, and firmly settle every regulation for the government of their future conduct…that each man should labor two or three hours in a day, the produce of which labor would, they imagine, be more than sufficient to support the colony…The produce of their industry is to be laid up in common for the use of all; and a good library of books is to be collected; and their leisure hours to be spent in study, liberal

> discussions, and the education of their children.…The employments of the women are to be the care of infant children, and other occupations suited to their strength; at the same time the greatest attention is to be paid to the cultivation of their minds. Every one is to enjoy is own religious and political opinions, provided they do not encroach on the rules previously made…They calculate that each gentlemen providing £125 will be sufficient to carry the scheme into execution. Finally, every individual is at liberty, whenever he pleases, to withdraw from the society (Qtd. in Grant 52-53).

The location of the proposed colony was to be in Pennsylvania along the Susquehanna River. Exactly how the Susquehanna River Valley was chosen for the home of Pantisocracy is unclear; however, speculation abounds amongst Romantic critics. The first person with a published theory was Robert Cottle, a publisher, bookseller, and friend of Southey and Coleridge. He states that the attraction for the men existed in the "noise" of its name. Cottle, in his Reminiscences of S.T. Coleridge and R. Southey, recollects:

> Mr. C's cooler friends could not ascertain that he had received any specific information respecting this notable river. "It was a grand river;" but there were many other grand and notable rivers in America; (the Land of Rivers!) and the preference given to the Susquehanna, seemed almost to arise solely from its imposing name, which, if not classical, was at least poetical, and it probably by mere accident became the center of all his pleasurable associations. Had this river been called the Miramichi or the Irrawaddy, it would have been despoiled of half its charms, and have sunk down into a vulgar stream, the atmosphere of which

> might have suited well enough Russian boars, but which would have been pestiferous to men of letters (22).

Although Cottle's theory gives an interesting glance into the lyrical sensibilities of Coleridge, others believe that there were more definitive factors at work when he made his site selection. Virginia M. Swartz, professor at Pennsylvania State University, writes in an article, title "Xanadu on the Susquehanna…Almost," that she believes Coleridge's choice was most deliberate. She notes, "Evidence exists that Coleridge had read some of those travel books popular in England in the final quarter of the eighteenth century" (20). She suggests a few of these titles, including The Travels of William Bartram, who was a native Pennsylvania and Imlay's Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America, would have given him some information about the riverside location (20). Swartz and Speck agree that Thomas Cooper's Some Information Respecting America, a publication written by a band of exiled Englishmen already living in a colony on the banks of the Susquehanna, greatly affected Coleridge's choice of location. Cooper, a Manchester manufacturer turned radical and disciple of Joseph Priestley, went to Pennsylvania to seek refuge from the wrath of Pitt's persecution of French Revolution sympathizers. Obviously, Cooper's book was a propaganda piece, written for those who were philosophically aligned "friends of liberty." The book's purpose was to persuade its readers to join the Susquehanna colony. Cooper paints an idyllic picture of Priestley's community:

> You would seek in America, in the first place, an asylum from civil persecution and religious intolerance. In my mind the first and principal feature is the total absence of anxiety respecting the future success of a family. There is little fault to find with the government of America, either in principle or in practice: we have

> very few taxes to pay, and those are of acknowledged necessity and moderate in amount; we have no animosities about religion; it is a subject about which no questions are asked: we have few respecting political men or political measures; the present irritation of men's minds in Great Britain, and the discordant state of society on political accounts, is not known there. The government is the government of the people and for the people [...] There are no men of great rank, nor many of great riches. Nor have the rich the power of oppressing the less rich, for poverty such as in Great Britain is almost unknown. Nor are their streets crowded with beggars I saw but one only while I was there, and he was English... Nor are the common people so depraved as in Great Britain. Quarrels are uncommon and boxing matches unknown in our streets. We have no Military to keep the people in awe (Qtd. in Speck 9).

According to Speck, Cooper gave several appealing reasons why Pennsylvania offered the best refuge for comrades like Coleridge: slavery had been abolished; there were peaceful relations with the neighboring Indians; land was abundant, cheap, and could be paid for with installments; and the climate was similar to that of England (9).

With these advantages in mind, Coleridge and Southey began to speak publicly about Pantisocracy on the lecture circuit. Additionally, each writer published several collections of their works and collaborated on a play, The Fall of Robspierre in order to raise the necessary money for their voyage. Before long, the first wave of Pantisocrats included poet Robert Lovell, and three sisters from the Fricker family. These sisters became the wives of the Pantisocrats: Edith married Southey; Mary became Lovell's wife, and Sara married Coleridge. There is speculation that Coleridge's love for Sara came about because marriage was a prerequisite for

members of the Pantisocracy. Every man and woman needed to be married. Sara was nearby due to her association with her sisters. Sadly, other than the first few years of marriage, the couple spent most of their time apart throughout their union. In The Waking Dream: A Study of Coleridge's Poetry, Patricia M. Adair agrees that their marriage could be described, at best, as difficult. She remarks, "The marriage was disastrous for both husband and wife and was the main reason for Coleridge's later unhappiness. It does, however, provide tragic-comic evidence of how deeply the whole man was involved in his intellectual theories. Even in his early poetry, we cannot underrate their importance; Coleridge's ideas and his life are one" (14). In addition to the sisters, their mother, Mrs. Fricker and Southey's own mother and brother Tom were ready to make the trip to America. Southey informed his friend, Horace Bedford in August of 1794, "We go at least twelve men with women and children. By this day twelvemonths, the Pantisocratic society of Aspheterists [people who are common owners of land] will be settled on the banks of the Susquehanna!" (Qtd. in Speck 7).

During the years of 1794-1796, Coleridge's poetry appears to have been influenced by the excitement caused by the impending establishment of his Pantisocratic dream. Coleridge wrote in a letter on July 15, 1794, "Pantisocracy! Oh, I shall have such a scheme of it! My head, my heart are all alive!" (Letters 79). Woodring asserts, that although a direct reference to the colony was limited to the few years of 1794-1796, the poet's belief in communal living exists throughout Coleridge's works (64). Woodring remarks, "A distinction can be maintained between the microcosm of the practical experiment and the universe of a utopian dream. Pantisocracy as an experiment has a smaller place in Coleridge's poems than the utopian dream that was to have 'aspherterized the Bounties of Nature'" (64). These two Coleridgian ideals merged in six of his poems written during this time. "Pantisocracy", "On the Prospect of

Establishing a Pantisocracy in America," "To a Young Ass," and "Monody on Chatterton" specifically mention the proposed colony and the Susquehanna River. In two others, "Domestic Peace," To the Rev. W. J. Hort," Woodring suggests that, although not specifically mentioned, "Pantisocracy appear[s]… as a quiet vale, enclosing toil, health, love, peace, and 'mild Equality'" (69). In these poems, Coleridge asks his reader to believe in a place where freedom and equality for all people could be found.

The opening lines of "Pantisocracy," written in 1794, seem to be a personal declaration of independence for the world-weary poet. He proclaims:

> No more my visionary soul shall dwell
> On joys that were; no more endure to weigh
> The shame and anguish of the evil day,
> Wisely forgetful! (1-4)

Coleridge states that his inner vision helps him to see the place of peace and renewal that awaits him where the best of humanity, Virtue and Passion, will freely dance together in the moonlight:

> O'er the ocean swell
> Sublime of Hope, I seek the cottag'd dell
> Where Virtue calm with careless step may stray,
> And dancing to the moonlight roundelay,
> The wizard Passions weave a holy spell (4-8).

He concludes this poem with a promise to his reader: " Eyes that have ach'd with Sorrow! /Ye shall weep/ Tears of doubt-mingled joy…/ And see the rising Sun, and feel it dart/ New rays of pleasance trembling to the heart." Imagine, the joy of this new world! As the Sun rises "o'er the

ocean,"(9-14) so begins the dawn of a new day, full of promise to those who are living under its warmth.

In this poem, Coleridge uses "seeing" or "eye" imagery. Notice the mention of his "visionary soul," (1) the "eyes that have ach'd" (9) and will "weep tears"(10) when they "see the rising Sun" (13). On the other hand, the closed eyes of the "fierce-eyed Fiends" (12) who are in "distemper'd sleep;"(11) those who are unable to see because of their closed eyes, seem to represent those who are responsible for the "shame" and "anguish" (3) that exists in the world. The employment of this image suggests that Coleridge's emphasis is on the metaphoric act of "seeing." Before an individual could live in harmony with nature and in equality with all of humanity, s/he must have the necessary vision.

Another poem that specifically mentions Pantisocracy is "On the Prospect of Establishing a Pantisocracy in America", written in 1794. Here Coleridge speaks of the impending political instability of France and England that caused so much angst in those with "generous bosoms,"(3) certainly a reference to those who, like Coleridge, sympathized with those involved in the French Revolution. He begins several lines with the word "whilst:" "Whilst …anguish…bosoms rend;" (1-3) "Whilst patriot souls …lament;" (4) and "Whilst…Despots vainly send to arrest the immortal mind's expanding ray/of everlasting Truth" (5-8). These lines reveal the evil that Coleridge sees in his native lands. This three-sided bombardment is the reason for seeking asylum from the anguish rendered by the current state of affairs. His heart is breaking from the disappointment of the violent turn of the French Revolution, and from the tyrannical Pitt who is silencing Coleridge's fellow political radicals. The "other clime," (8) the place "free from the ills which here are peace destroy/" (13)"Where dawns, with hope serene, a brighter day/ Than e'er saw Albion in her happiest times…" (9-10) appeals to Coleridge. Again,

the sight images are employed to emphasis the need for vision. Coleridge promises that the seers will be rewarded: “With mental eye exulting now explore, / And soon with kindred minds shall haste to enjoy” (11-12). These pilgrims will find “Content and Bliss on Transatlantic shore” (14). Both of these poems comfort their reader; they promise a place of refuge, a place of rest from life’s troubles over the sea. In Coleridge’s mind, this anticipated, peaceful, and exotic land of the New World offers a bower of refuge for the soon-to-be occupants.

Another early poem, 1794’s “To a Young Ass,” is, according to Woodring, “the most noteworthy and notorious poem inspired by Pantisocracy fraternity…” (69). Noteworthy because of its sincerity and notorious because of the author’s “daring …identification of man with an ass…(Woodring 72). In it, the narrator, Coleridge, sees a tethered donkey and in this creature, symbolizes the downtrodden of the world. The donkey is terribly sorrowful: “ragged,” (4) possessing “dull spirits,” (5) and a “moveless head” that is “hung” (8). What is the reason for this animal’s sadness? Its mother, not far away, is “Chain’d to a log within a narrow spot, / Where the close-eaten grass is scarcely seen, / While sweet around her waves the tempting green!” (16-18). The narrator blames the donkey’s downcast but unsympathetic master for its sad condition: “Thy master should have learnt to show/ Pity — best taught by fellowship of Woe! / For much I fear me that *He* lives like thee, / Half famish’d in a land of Luxury!” (19-22). Coleridge, moved to sympathy, hails the animal as “Brother,” (26) and decides to take the creature to a place where he can run without restraint. The poet envisions the potential for future bliss: “How thou wouldst toss thy heels in gamesome play, / And frisk about, as lamb or kitten gay!” (31-32).

To some of Coleridge’s contemporaries, this poem was pure folly. It was difficult for many, according to Woodring, to understand the irony of the poem. The remarks, “The extreme sadness of the ass may not come from its own miserable lot …but, from its pity for its more

strictly chained mother, and the related irony that the master of the pair has not learned from his own very similar state of oppression, 'half famish'ed in a land of Luxury, to pity his fellow beasts of burden Even when reduced to the inhuman level of a jackass, the man has less pity than the jackass has" (71). However ridiculous this appears, there was method to this seeming lapse of propriety on Coleridge's part. Woodring explains:

> To offer an ass a place as a brother in the vale of equality, "spite of the fool's scorn," challenges most of us to be scornful fools, but the lines are politically intelligible: they called attention to a political proposition by exaggerating it deliberately…Coleridge is not arguing metaphysically that we are joined in divinely plastic and organic brotherhood with ass…Although less profoundly, he is asserting politically that Nature so desires human brotherhood that the ass may be taken as a symbol of the downtrodden meek to whom the more fortunate should bend in human comradeship. Renouncing all power over our fellows, we seek—in 1794—equality of condition (72).

Coleridge's sympathy for those in less than ideal circumstances certainly is evident in this poem; furthermore, it demonstrates the depth of his commitment to Pantisocracy and the willingness to share his dream with even the lowest of creatures.

"To A Young Ass" is one of Coleridge's most revised in all of his works because of the criticism it received over the years (Woodring 69). Later editions of this poem contain no direct reference to the Pantisocracy colony, although the idea of utopian escape still exists in later editions: "And fain would take thee with me, in the Dell/ Of Peace and mild Equality to dwell, / Where Toil shall call the charmer Health his bride, / And Laughter tickle Plenty's ribless side! (27-30). In contrast, the poem as it was originally written, contains a specific reference to the

proposed Pennsylvania colony: “And fain would take thee with me, in the Dell/ Of lofty-soul’d Pantisocracy to dwell / Where Toil shall call the charmer Health his bride, / And Laughter tickle Plenty’s ribless side!” (Qtd. in Woodring 72). According to Woodring, Coleridge makes this substitution because he realized the negative associations that might surface when his contemporaries saw the word “Pantisocracy” (Woodring 74). However, Coleridge remained committed to the ideals that his colony, had it been established, would have symbolized.

Furthermore, Woodring also notes that at about the time the Pantisocracy omission in “To A Young Ass” was made, Coleridge perplexingly added several lines to a poem that contained a direct reference to the scheme. He wrote “Monody on the Death of Chatterton” in 1790, following the death of a childhood friend. According to Woodring (73-74), Coleridge added these lines to the memorial poem because he realized that the “downtrodden marvelous boy was not alive to join fellow Pantisocrats in the Susquehanna dale…” (72). The addition, consisting of 23 lines, duplicates several of the lines found in the earlier poem, “Pantisocracy:”

> Wisely forgetful! O’er the ocean swell
> Sublime of Hope I seek the cottag’d dell
> Where Virtue calm with careless step may stray;
> And, dancing to the moon-light roundelay,
> The wizard Passions weave a holy spell! (143-148).

Following these lines, Coleridge addresses his deceased friend with this invocation: “O Chatterton! that thou wert yet alive! / Sure thou would’st spread the canvass to the gale,/ And love with us the tinkling team to drive/ O’er peaceful Freedom’s undivided dale” (149-152). Coleridge then vividly describes a night in the New World with his friend, if he were with him:

> And we, at sober eve, would round thee throng,

Would hang, enraptur'd, on thy stately song,

And greet with smiles the young-eyed Poesy

All deftly mask'd as hoar Antiquity (153-156).

As he returns to his senses, Coleridge reprimands himself for such idle fantasies: "Alas, vain Phantasies! the fleeting brood/ Of Woe self-solac'd in her dreamy mood! (157-159). Still, he vows to keep his dear friend's memory alive at the Pantisocracy where Coleridge and his company will, " …on some hill, whose forest-frowning side/ Waves o'er the murmurs of his calmer tide, / Will raise a solemn Cenotaph to thee, / Sweet Harper of time-shrouded Minstrelsy! (161-163). Coleridge promises his dead friend that the place of his monument will be hallowed ground; a place for meditation; a place where all could recollect the difficult past and celebrate the deliverance from it: "And there, sooth'd sadly by the dirgeful wind, / Muse on the sore ills I had left behind" (160-161). Woodring believes that this addition made Coleridge's original tribute to Chatterton "less stable" when Coleridge inserted autobiographical stanzas that "thenceforward have had to be explained with a biographical reference to a passing enthusiasm" (73). The poem is no longer a timeless tribute; a reader unfamiliar with the Pantisocracy scheme would find the ending quite perplexing. Woodring argues: "A reader of the altered monody on Chatterton will conclude that a self-pitying poet, desiring escape, sought a solution theoretically political" (73). Such a conclusion would lessen the poem's original intent: a lament to a deceased friend.

In addition to the references of Pantisocracy in his poems from 1794-1796, Coleridge employs the image of the "cottaged dell" without specifically attaching the Pantisocratic name to the idea espoused in the poem. "Domestic Peace," written in 1794, originally appeared as a soliloquy in The Fall of Robespierre.'' Coleridge later published the piece as a poem after the

play was received poor reviews. These verses extol the same virtues of a place similar to those of the proposed Susquehanna colony. Domestic Peace is personified as a "Halcyon daughter of the skies" (3) that flies far "From the pomp of Sceptered State/ From the rebel's noisy hate" (5-6); references to England's monarchy and the terrorist-like Jacobins. Again, Coleridge's uses the image of a "cottag'd vale" as a symbol of bliss and peace (7). This is where "Domestic Peace" can be found. She is "spotless,"(10) smiles "through her tears," (12) and is ever conscious of the difficult "past" which makes the peaceful present all the more pleasant (13-14). Similar to "Domestic Peace" is 1795's "To the Rev. W. J. Hort While Teaching a Young Lady some Song-tunes on his Flute." In this poem, Coleridge pays tribute to a music teacher. He promises the man that he will remember his music when he is "In Freedom's UNDIVIDED dell" (15). There can be little doubt that this dell is the Susquehanna property because similar descriptions of his proposed residence have been used in other poems that specifically name the Pantisocratic colony. Coleridge promises to remember Rev. Hort:

> Where *Toil* and *Health* with mellow'd *Love* shall dwell,
> Far from folly, far from men,
> In the rude romantic glen,
> Up the cliff, and thro' the glade,
> Wandering with the dear-lov'd maid,
> I shall listen to the lay,
> And ponder on thee far away
> Still, as she bids those thrilling notes aspire
> ''Making my fond attuned heart her lyre'',
> Thy honour'd form, my Friend! shall reappear

And I will thank thee with a raptur'd tear (16-26).

Without a name, the descriptions of the bucolic places in "Domestic Peace" and in "To the Rev. W. J. Hort" seem to parallel those images traditionally associated with the western conception of heaven. This is not a coincidence. To Coleridge, the Pantisocracy was to be his heaven on earth. He believed, for a time, that the Susquehanna colony would be the place where he would build his cottage of bliss, both physically and metaphorically.

By 1795, Coleridge and Southey's dream seemed to be slipping away. Speck remarks that, " The idea [of Pantisocracy] had really foundered… not on financial but on philosophical rocks" (14). The temperamental and intellectual differences between the partners caused a strain in their relationship, which ultimately brought about the demise of Pantisocracy. According to Stephen Weissman, author of His Brother's Keeper: a Psychobiography of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Southey primarily concerned himself with the problems of raising money and support for the scheme while Coleridge was discussing its theoretical merits in Cambridge colleges (16). Additionally, sufficient funds were not raised, although it is possible, had Coleridge and Southey been on better terms and remained committed to the scheme, that the group could have set sail as originally planned (Weissman 60-63).

In 1795, Coleridge wrote "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement." As he was writing this poem, the poet realizes that his dreams of communal living in isolation and escape were at an end. In these verses, Coleridge discusses his reasons for abandoning the project and for leaving his perfectly cottaged dell; Certainly, a metaphor for the quickly dissipating dream of the Pantisocracy. He begins this poem with a description of his blissful retreat:

Low was our pretty Cot: our tallest Rose

Peep'd at the chamber-window. We could hear

> At silent noon, and eve, and early morn,
> The Sea's faint murmur. 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! (1-9).

As he (and unnamed others) are tucked away from the cares of the world and surrounded by fragrant flowers and the rush of the ocean waves, a "wealthy son of Commerce" (11) stares longingly at their cottage and sighs, calling it a "Blesséd Place" (17). As good as this utopic life seems, the narrator's satisfaction dissipates when he climbs up a mountain and, from the peek's vantage, sees the neighboring village below, and recognizes the beauty of civilization. Coleridge writes, "It seem'd like Omnipresence! / God, methought, / Had built him there a Temple: the whole World/ Seem'd imag'd in its vast circumference…" (38-40). It was on this metaphorical mountaintop, perhaps a symbol of the very precipice that Coleridge was exploring by the end of 1795. He realized that his scheme to retire to Pennsylvania—or was it to escape? —was not going to materialize as he had hoped. He needed to abandon his self-imposed isolation from the pain of the world. The poem continues:

> Ah! quiet Dell! dear Cot, and Mount sublime!
> 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? (43-48).

Again, as in "To A Young Ass," Coleridge identifies with the downtrodden in his society. This epiphanial moment helps him to recognize the folly in self-imposed isolation. He realizes that he must work for freedom within the walls of the village and not to be like a pied piper, leading others into the wilderness with a beautiful song, only to have them drown in the river as they try to follow. He then makes a vow to leave his beloved cottage " and join head, heart, and hand, / Active and firm, to fight the bloodless fight / Of Science, Freedom, and the Truth in Christ (60-63). However, he understands that the spirit of the beloved cottage, his dream of Pantisocracy, will remain with him. Although physically separating from the dell, Coleridge promises that he will return to his peaceful dell, " My spirit shall revisit thee, dear Cot! / Thy Jasmin and thy window-peeping Rose, / And Myrtles fearless of the mild sea-air" (65-67). The poet bids adieu to his "sweet Abode" (68) and offers a prayer to God that all people might someday realize the love that they are capable of showing one another. "Ah! — had none greater!" writes the defeated but hopeful poet, "And that all had such! / It might be so — but the time is not yet. / Speed it, O Father! Let thy Kingdom come!" (69-71).

Over the years, Coleridge critics have speculated "what might have been" had the Pantisocracy scheme become reality. Dr. Speck believes, as Joseph Priestley, Jr. did, that the Pantisocrats were typical of people who had expressed interest in going to the Susquehanna, but had failed to fulfill their plans. Priestley and Speck hint that, perhaps, this failure was in the best interest of everyone involved. In 1796, Priestley observed that, "The generality of Englishmen that come to this country [America], with such erroneous ideas and unless previously accustomed to a life of labor, are so ill qualified to commence cultivation in a wilderness, that the projectors would most probably have been subject to still more unfounded abuse than they

had been. The well meant endeavors to promote the interests of their countrymen would have been worthless" (Qtd. in Speck 16). Realistically, this scenario is the most probable outcome if the colony been founded. However, what if the Pantisocracy in America had been successful? What kind of poetry would have been written because of the many afternoons spent in study and meditation? How would the second generation of Pantisocrats react when confronted with a greedy visitor or a warring neighbor? Most likely, the Pantisocrats would have discovered the "dell within", as Coleridge did by the end of 1795, when he allowed his utopian dream slip through his fingers. They, like Coleridge, would have realized the innate value in assisting their neighbors, while patiently waiting for the time when humanity could live together like the strings of an Aeolian harp; strummed individually by the hands of God but still acting in harmony with one another.

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