“Frost at Midnight” (1798)

1. What ministry is the frost performing? Why is it secret?

2. One of Coleridge’s inspirations for this poem is William Cowper’s The Task (Book IV, “The Winter Evening”). How has he drawn from Cowper?

   . . . I am conscious, and confess
   Fearless, a soul that does not always think.
   Me oft has a fancy ludicrous and wild
   Soothed with a waking dream of houses, tow’rs,
   Trees, churches, and strange visages expressed
   In the red cinders, while with poring eye
   I gazed, myself creating what I saw.
   Nor less amused have I quiescent watched
   The sooty films that play upon the bars–
   Pendulous, and foreboding in the view
   Of superstition, prophesying still,
   Though still deceived, some stranger’s near approach.

   Tomorrow brings a change, a total change
   Which even now—though silently performed,
   And slowly, and by most unfelt – the face
   of universal nature undergoes.
   Fast falls a fleecy show’r. The downy flakes
   Descending, and with never-ceasing lapse
   Softly alighting upon all below,
   Assimilate all objects.

3. Why should silence disturb meditation?
4. He begins a conversation with himself about the “film . . . which flutter’d on the grate.” What does he mean by this; what does the note say about the film?

5. What does he mean when he says that the “living spirit in our frame,/ That loves not to behold a lifeless thing, / Transfuses into all it’s own delights/ It’s own volition”

6. The poem includes a benediction (a blessing) to his 1 ½ year old son, Hartley (born Sept 1796). What role does childhood take on here? What importance does he give to childhood play and family connection? What about his son’s life does he hope will be different than what he (Coleridge) experienced?

7. Turn to page 573 (Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”); how does Wordsworth draw from Coleridge? What differences do you see between them? How does this reflect the emphasis on creative and intellectual community we discussed in our analysis of Dorothy Wordsworth?