

Lives of the Great Romantics II

Coleridge

Edited by
Ralph Pite



ROUTLEDGE



LIVES OF THE GREAT ROMANTICS II

GENERAL EDITOR: JOHN MULLAN

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Coleridge, 21st March 1804, pencil drawing by George Dance
By courtesy of The Wordsworth Trust

George Dance (1745–1825) was an architect and portrait-painter. He was called in by his close friend, Sir George Beaumont, to help redesign Coleorton. Coleridge may have met Dance through the project. The exact date of this drawing is unknown but Southey saw it in an exhibition in summer 1804 and hated it: 'Dance's drawing has that merit at least, that nobody would ever suspect you of having been the original.' (Southey, II, p. 291) This is strange because the picture's likeness to other contemporary portraits is obvious. Coleridge, however, looks blank and heavy with fatigue. Dance's direct style offers no gloss on its subject and, by doing so, captures something of the dejection and bafflement Coleridge suffered around 1803–4.

LIVES OF THE GREAT ROMANTICS II

KEATS, COLERIDGE & SCOTT
BY THEIR CONTEMPORARIES

VOLUME

2

COLERIDGE

EDITED BY
RALPH PITE

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To my parents



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INTRODUCTION

Coleridge's life proved very difficult to write. Wordsworth and Southey, his two closest contemporaries and friends, were honoured with full-scale biographies, published soon after their death: Southey died in 1843, and the six-volume *Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey* appeared in 1849-50, edited by his son, Charles Cuthbert Southey; Wordsworth's brother, Christopher, produced the *Memoirs of Wordsworth* in two volumes in 1851, only a year after Wordsworth's death. No such official biography of Coleridge ever appeared: James Gillman, Coleridge's doctor, landlord and friend from 1816 until 1834, began *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*; one fascinating but disorganised volume appeared in 1838; when Gillman died the following year, no-one completed the task. In the 1880s two brief, critical biographies were written by Hall Caine and H. D. Traill; and in 1894, James Dykes Campbell published the first, remotely thorough account of Coleridge's life, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Narrative of the Events of his Life*. Then, in 1895, Ernest Hartley Coleridge, Coleridge's grandson, edited the *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, the first extensive or reliable collection of his correspondence to see the light of day, and *Anima Poetae: from the Unpublished Notebooks of S. T. Coleridge*.

Responsibility for an official version of Coleridge devolved onto Ernest – as a loyal member of the family, and a gifted scholar who had access to the papers. Reviews of the Letters looked forward to the appearance of the biography: 'we are consoled by the prospect of a coming biography by the same editor, in which he will surely avail himself of all the material at his disposal' (Jackson, II, p. 199). Similarly, Campbell's modestly plain 'narrative of the events' of Coleridge's life was presented as 'something which might serve until the appearance of the full biography which is expected from the hands of the poet's grandson, Mr. Ernest Hartley Coleridge' (Campbell, p. vi). Leslie Stephen confirmed the assumption: 'A complete biography still remains to be written; it may be expected from Mr. Ernest Coleridge, who is in possession of a great mass of his grandfather's papers' (Stephen, III, p. 339n). Perhaps the burden of expectation was disabling but, for whatever reason, no biography appeared.

In 1934, G. H. B. Coleridge, the next in the family line, explained the book's non-appearance in terms reminiscent of Coleridge himself:

It is, in my opinion, one of the tragedies in the History of English Literature that the proposed Life of Coleridge by his grandson, Ernest Hartley Coleridge, was never concluded. From the small fragments that exist, it might be assumed that it was scarcely begun; but it is hardly an exaggeration to say that a lifetime had been spent in its preparation, and that the actual writing of it, had health and spirits remained, would have been the least and easiest task. [...] All of it, together with valuable MSS., was lost, pilfered from a railway-station goods-yard. Years of toil thus vanished in a night. (Blunden and Griggs, p. 3)

The idea of an authorised biography, written from within the family, vanished as well. In 1938, E. K. Chambers completed his *'Biographical Study'* of Coleridge and, since the war, a good number of biographies by professionals and academics have appeared – by Walter Jackson Bate, Basil Willey, Richard Holmes and, most recently, Rosemary Ashton. They have accompanied the complete, scholarly editions of Coleridge's prose and poetry, his letters, and his notebooks which have been in progress since the mid-fifties and are now nearing completion. The absence in the nineteenth century of any equivalent to these biographies and comprehensive editions becomes more striking as Coleridge's exceptional talents emerge from them.

The first and most pressing reason at the time for drawing a veil over Coleridge's life was the scandal of his opium-addiction. In the Romantic period, laudanum, a tincture of opium, was frequently prescribed as a pain-killer and sedative. Its hallucinogenic and mood-enhancing properties were well-known but its addictive power, unfortunately, was not understood. Coleridge was given opium for medical reasons when he was still at school and administered it to himself as a student. During the 1790's the drug gradually became his habitual refuge when depressed or dispirited, so that by the end of the decade he was, without realising it, profoundly addicted. In 1797, he composed 'Kubla Khan' under the influence of opium, in the state of heightened awareness, between sleep and waking, that it brought about. Coleridge states this in the manuscript version of the poem: 'This fragment [...] composed in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium'. When it was first published in 1816, however, he was more oblique: 'In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep'. His indirectness struggles to keep up appearances without actually lying. Some readers might easily believe that opium was meant by the 'anodyne' but, if so, they would not be justified in challenging Coleridge's motives for taking it. He was only trying, he claims, to relieve bodily pain.

This is a characteristic move that Coleridge makes throughout his years of addiction – that is, from 1797 or thereabouts until 1816. He never freed himself completely from opium but, after 1816, when he was settled with the Gillmans in Highgate, his intake was severely regulated and restrained. It is

difficult to judge exactly how much he consumed because he became more and more secretive as his dependency increased. From 1800 to 1803, when his marriage was failing, his poetic career faltering and his relationship with Wordsworth growing embittered, Coleridge seems to have taken the drug in large quantities. His journey to Malta in 1804 was intended to rid him of the physical illnesses which he blamed for his drug-use. Probably, the illnesses were withdrawal symptoms and, consequently, the Mediterranean climate offered no release. When he returned in 1806, he was at least as addicted as before. For the next three years, while he was living, off and on, with the Wordsworths, Coleridge was probably more moderate but when, in 1810, he quarrelled seriously with Wordsworth and left the Lake District, the drug-dependency increased again. It reached its greatest extreme in the winter of 1813-14, when Coleridge's friend and mainstay, John Morgan, was bankrupted and Coleridge found himself back in Bristol without money, prospects or support. No letters survive from this period. Coleridge began communicating with his friends when, in April 1814, he once more started his life over again.

Coleridge's secrecy about opium created widespread ignorance about how badly he misused it. Friends knew that he drank heavily – usually brandy – and report their efforts to discourage him. Contemporaries knew that he was unreliable and dilatory in his work and that he often pleaded ill-health. Most who knew him at all well knew that, at times, he resorted to laudanum but his own expressions of extreme guilt and of hatred for the 'accursed poison' led them to underestimate the extent of the problem. He managed, for instance, to mislead the Gillmans for several years, keeping up an arrangement with a local apothecary that they knew nothing about. When they did discover, it was very nearly the end of Coleridge's residence in the house.

Ignorance was coupled with reticence: like Coleridge himself, Coleridge's friends knew the damage to his reputation which public knowledge of the addiction would bring and, even in private letters, spoke euphemistically or indirectly about it. This has kept the subject a matter of speculation and dispute until the present day – Coleridge's modern advocates lessen his intake and his enemies increase it. During his life, the secret (so far as it was known) was kept quite successfully within the family. However, as soon as Coleridge was dead, Thomas de Quincey, himself a famous addict, published reminiscences of Coleridge in which opium was writ large. By getting in so quickly – the articles appeared in 1834-5 – de Quincey forced any subsequent biographer to challenge his version. No biography of Coleridge could leave the question untouched (whereas the unknown scandals in Wordsworth's life could be ignored in his brother's book.) Worse still, as far as an official biography was concerned, Joseph Cottle, a friend of Coleridge from his Bristol days, published his *Early Recollections* in 1837. These included Cottle's

lengthy and horrified account of discovering Coleridge's addiction and, catastrophically, a letter from Coleridge requesting Cottle to reveal all. Any respectable and discreet account of Coleridge would, from then on, look like a betrayal.

Letters such as the one Cottle published were another reason for hesitating over a biography. Coleridge was a prolific letter-writer and an absolutely reckless one. He was massively inconsistent, adapting his style, his views, even, it appears, his beliefs according to the prejudices of his correspondent. More dangerously, perhaps, he used his letters as a confessional – letters are filled with his sins, his weaknesses, his hostilities, and the most intricate, unsavoury details of his physical state. Yet, in the rush of his self-expression, Coleridge gained an uncanny sharpness of thought: his comments on Wordsworth in 1800-1, for instance, pinpointed disagreements that emerged much less clearly fifteen years later in their published version, *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge's mind often worked most impressively when it was least self-conscious, when the problem of his own identity could be momentarily brushed aside.

Desire for self-forgetfulness was an element in Coleridge's drug-use as well as in the way he wrote letters. Both activities left a biographer trying to rescue him from his own mistakes. Moreover, this longing to be rid of himself is the fundamental difficulty about writing Coleridge's biography. His treatment of his wife and his putative, platonic affair with Sara Hutchinson were scandals to be wary of, as was his radical, Pantisocratic youth by contrast with his later conservatism. These problems could, however, have been readily sidelined if, as was the case with Wordsworth and Southey, Coleridge's life had been given a comprehensible shape. Any such shape is very hard to find.

Wordsworth's life and Southey's tell a success story – from obscurity to eminence, from struggle to achievement. This is so because both poets had ambitions and targets, many of which they attained. Conscious fashioning of their own lives was accompanied by the establishment and presentation of a consistent personality. And, because they led their lives purposefully, they became attractive subjects for biography, generating themselves the structure that a biographer would later endorse. By comparison, Coleridge's life is a shambles. One project after another is started and abandoned; one friendship after another flourishes and fizzles out; one attempt at self-reform is followed only by another. Critics are drawn to thinking of him as a sad case: Leslie Stephen remarked of him that 'when all is said, the history, both of the man and the thinker, will always be a sad one – the saddest in some senses that we can read' (Stephen, III, p. 368). T. S. Eliot wrote of 'the sad ghost of Coleridge', and called 'Dejection: An Ode': 'one of the saddest of confessions that I have ever read'. Of 'Kubla Khan', he added, 'Organisation is necessary as well as "inspiration"'. (Eliot, pp. 156, 68, 146).

Lacking this gift for organisation, Coleridge seems to have led no kind of life. He was, nevertheless, an exceptionally gifted person who wrote profusely and brilliantly in prose and poetry. He had, perhaps, the precociousness and emotional immaturity of many gifted children. Certainly, he resisted 'organisation' because he regarded determined self-fashioning as a slander on his talents. By relying so heavily on 'inspiration', Coleridge was, without doubt, seeking authenticity, but he was seeking as well confirmation that, to him, these achievements were effortless. His poem 'Frost at Midnight' recalls and recovers a moment when thinking happened naturally. Similarly, Coleridge's idea of 'organic form' in works of art praises their power of unforced, even effortless achievement. However, Coleridge's resistance to the 'world of hard trying' meant that, in depression and after disappointment, he found himself caught between the need to exert himself and the belief that exertion proved him a failure. He was disabled by feeling that struggle was a humiliation. In consequence, the talents he was so proud of began to seem an ambiguous gift: a promise of magical powers which had deceived him and, in the process, corrupted him, denying him the manliness needed for the task of life. Yet, when he did recover something of his ability – when he wrote a pyrotechnic letter or talked successfully one evening – that recovery proved once again that he was exceptional, that there was no need for the likes of him to make an effort.

Coleridge's indolence was commented on a great deal by those who knew him and regarded as constitutional, as an inevitable part of his make-up. No doubt, this was partly true – Coleridge preferred pleasure to labour; he particularly enjoyed a drink, a good dinner and talking into the small hours. As a boy, he had been tubby and, in his thirties, he began putting on a great deal of weight. Those who met him in his old age remarked on his fatness and slow-moving walk, often by contrast with Wordsworth's leanness and agility. Laziness became, however, Coleridge's way of defying other people's greater success (especially Wordsworth's). Simultaneously, it was part of his depressed reaction to being surpassed. It alternated with periods of frenetic activity, usually of either writing or walking. In these bursts of energy, Coleridge seemed to be hurrying to catch up with his more successful friends and, at the same time, showing off the enormous ability that lay hidden within his habitual lassitude.

Coleridge's under-achievement, then, was not simply the result of laziness or drug-addiction, though both of these played their part. Coleridge did relatively little because he wanted to be everything, to avoid the restrictions imposed by a role in life or a career or a biography; the 'organisation', that Eliot insists on, was felt by Coleridge as the shutting off of possibility. Likewise, he wanted to be, at once, a journalist, a poet, a philosopher, a dramatist, an aesthete, a scientist and a father. H. D. Traill divided up Coleridge's life

into three periods: 'Poetical: 1772-1799', 'Critical: 1799-1816', and 'Metaphysical and Theological: 1816-1834' (Traill, p. iii). It is a convenient scheme because it is approximately true, but Coleridge, whatever his changes in emphasis, was a poet, a critic and a metaphysician all at the same time throughout his life. To become one of these exclusively would be to place himself in competition with other poets or critics or philosophers; Coleridge was both fearful of that encounter and contemptuous of it. His variety, like his indolence, proved that his superiority did not require proof.

From 1799, when he returned from Germany, until 1816, Coleridge's life is extraordinarily rudderless and chaotic. Before that, he had made some excusable false starts and gradually developed his gift for poetry. Afterwards, in Highgate, Coleridge set himself up as an example and a lesson. He played the role of survivor and chastened transgressor, instructing young men to learn from him by avoiding his mistakes. This stance of 'the sage of Highgate' requires a degree of self-focussing and it produced more stability than he had experienced for years. Yet, if the years before 1816 were shapeless, the years in Highgate were fixed and motionless. It is as if Coleridge's life was already over and he was living out his reputation, not seeking to achieve anything further but, instead, willing to repeat the lesson life had taught him. It is indolence again and another kind of freedom: Coleridge in Highgate remains untouched by the world through striking the pose of someone who has already seen life through to the end.

Shapelessness followed by motionlessness does not make a good story. Because biography relies on narrative, Coleridge's life fits extremely badly into its organising structures. We gain a better picture of him from the succession of glimpses offered by this anthology. This is so for the additional reason that Coleridge lived in his performances. His contemporaries describe him, time and again, as 'wonderful' and 'extraordinary', as an unrivalled conversationalist and brilliant lecturer. Wordsworth is revered as the greatest of contemporary poets, as the representative in his day of a tradition stretching back to Chaucer and beyond. Coleridge, by contrast, is unprecedented. There is no standard by which to judge him and no category in which to class him. He became a phenomenon and, in his talk, he eagerly provided evidence of his extraordinary powers, finding in exceptionality a form of identity that would not restrict him.

Many of those who met him were content to report the astounding features of the man or to raise eyebrows at his eccentricity. Clearly, he was an overwhelming presence – even Sir Walter Scott, who encountered him in 1828, confessed to being overpowered:

Lockhart and I dined with Sotheby where we met a large dining-party the orator of which was that extraordinary man Coleridge. After eating a hearty dinner

during which he spoke not a word he began a most learned [sic.] harangue on the Samo-thracian mysteries [...] Zounds, I was never so bethumped with words (Scott, p. 462)

Yet Coleridge was a phenomenon who attracted disciples: J. H. Green, Thomas Allsop, F. D. Maurice, Julius Hare, John Sterling, and Coleridge's nephews, John Taylor and Henry Nelson Coleridge, all sought wisdom in the Gillmans' house in Highgate. Part of the attraction lay in the sheer magnitude of Coleridge's eloquence and learning; part in his combination of benevolence and moral certainty, of kindliness and authority. Coleridge's lack of definition also enabled his disciples to read him in radically different ways. Each of them tended to feel that they truly understood Coleridge and what he was, in general, trying to say. J. H. Green, for instance, set himself the task of arranging Coleridge's scattered thoughts in such a way that the system within them would be revealed. The result of that endeavour was his book *Spiritual Philosophy: Founded on the Teaching of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, published in 1865. Similarly, Thomas Allsop, one of Coleridge's most fervent admirers, compiled his *Letters Conversations and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1836), under the conviction that he, of all Coleridge's listeners, truly grasped the spirit of his thought and could faithfully apply the Coleridgean method to arguments of his own. The Coleridge family, reluctant to write a biography, nonetheless, considered themselves the rightful keepers of the flame, not least because they knew the context of thought and experience which would explain Coleridge's most obscure remarks. Henry Nelson collected that context by recording Coleridge's *Table Talk* and editing his *Literary Remains*; Sara Coleridge, Henry Nelson's wife and Coleridge's daughter, worked devotedly on annotated editions of *Biographia Literaria* and her collection of Coleridge's political journalism, the *Essays on His Own Times*. Ernest Hartley Coleridge's 1890's editions of the letters and notebooks follow on in the same family tradition.

All of these projects are, in part, substitutes for the non-existent 'biography'. Each, however, also claims to present the truth about Coleridge. Coleridge's reputation was not exactly fought over as Shelley's was. He was too ambiguous a figure to become quite so controversial. Because he remained as inscrutable as an oracle, the conflicting interpretations of him rapidly diverge according to the interests of the interpreter. These interpretations, however, are not simply distortions because Coleridge himself created the inconsistency and ambiguity they record; he performed himself to each according to their needs, sensing with eerie rapidity the side of him that a visitor would want to see or be able to understand. Shelley, who never met Coleridge but read his work avidly, sensed the obscurity that shrouded him and, like other disciples, he offered his own reading:

You will see Coleridge, he who sits obscure
 In the exceeding lustre, and the pure
 Intense irradiation of a mind
 Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
 Flaps wearily through darkness and despair –
 A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
 A hooded eagle among blinking owls. –
 'Letter to Maria Gisborne', ll. 202-9 (June 1820)

Though Shelley promises his friend, Maria Gisborne, that she 'will see Coleridge', he also denies her access: Coleridge's obscurity and self-involvement mean he cannot be seen. That invisibility is both the mark of other-worldly thoughtfulness and of self-defeating over-ambition. Coleridge is both 'pure' and 'exceeding'; sincere in his attempts and blinded by over-reaching himself. Shelley's friend, Thomas Love Peacock, more confidently took Coleridge to task for writing obscurely and trying to solve puzzles beyond the scope of human intelligence. Shelley's admiration for Coleridge is in a greater tension with his admiration for him. Coleridge's excessiveness and blindness, his eventual darkness and despair, are thought to be the sad fate of the intellectual in Shelley's benighted days.

Shelley's reading, then, is insightful and self-referential in equal measure. Through his mixture of performativeness and ambiguity, Coleridge turned himself into someone others were prompted to interpret by their own lights. Dorothy Wordsworth disapproved of this tendency, as she wrote to Lady Beaumont in September 1806. Coleridge had returned from Malta but was lingering in London, unwilling to travel north and confront his wife. One possible financial stop-gap seems to have been the idea of giving some public lectures:

I do not mean to say that much permanent good may not be produced by communicating knowledge by means of lectures, but a man is perpetually tempted to lower himself to his hearers to bring them into sympathy with him, and no one would be more likely to yield to such temptation than Coleridge

This temptation, however, can be resisted by determined application:

he should have one grand object before him which would turn his thoughts away in a steady course from his own unhappy lot, and so prevent petty irritations and distresses, and in the end produce a habit of reconciliation and submission. (Breen, p. 166)

It was not in Coleridge to do this, in the same way that it was not in Wordsworth to complete *The Recluse*. Dorothy seems, ironically, to be both reproducing Wordsworth's harsh judgement of his friend and repeating what she often said of Wordsworth himself. Both men, it seems, would have been

much happier if they had been able to stick to 'one grand object', instead of wasting their time with lectures or, in Wordsworth's case, with a multitude of short poems.

It is this contradiction that lies at the heart of Wordsworth's understanding of Coleridge. Coleridge flaunted the weaknesses that Wordsworth struggled to overcome. He could appear, at different times, a warning to him or a mockery of him. He could also become, in his effortlessness and intellectual power, an object of envy. His indolence might have been his undoing, in Wordsworth's eyes, but it also gave him a carefreeness and spontaneity that liberated all who met him; that seemed, indeed, to embody the spirit of liberty. Wordsworth spoke of this most generously in his poem, significantly entitled 'Stanzas Written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence"', written in 1802 and published in 1815. After sketching in someone like himself, Wordsworth describes his companion:

With him there often walked in friendly guise,
Or lay upon the moss by brook or tree,
A noticeable Man with large grey eyes,
And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly
As if a blooming face it ought to be;
Heavy his low-hung lip did oft appear,
Deprest by weight of musing Phantasy;
Profound his forehead was, though not severe;
Yet some did think that he had little business here:

Sweet heaven forbend! his was a lawful right;
Noisy he was, and gamesome as a boy;
His limbs would toss about him with delight,
Like branches when strong winds the trees annoy.
Nor lacked his calmer hours device or toy
To banish listlessness and irksome care;
He would have taught you how you might employ
Yourself; and many did to him repair,
And certes not in vain; he had inventions rare.

Expedients, too, of simplest sort he tried:
Long blades of grass, plucked round him as he lay,
Made, to his ear attentively applied,
A pipe on which the wind would deftly play;
Glasses he had, that little things display,
The beetle panoplied in gems and gold,
A mailed angel on a battle-day;
The mysteries that cups of flowers enfold,
And all the gorgeous sights which fairies do behold.

He would entice that other Man to hear
 His music, and to view his imagery:
 And, sooth, these two were each to the other dear:
 No livelier love in such a place could be:
 There did they dwell—from earthly labour free,
 As happy spirits as were ever seen;
 (ll. 37-69)

Wordsworth reveals a secret world in which the true virtues of Coleridge can appear. He presents his account as his special knowledge of someone who is easily misjudged: 'some did think that he had little business here'. He both advocates Coleridge and keeps him to himself, arguing that the true Coleridge exists in private, as one of two 'happy spirits' where 'earthly labour' is unknown. The quaintness of the verse-form in these stanzas distances the experience, as if Wordsworth recognises that the true Coleridge can be found and kept only by means of a deliberate fiction. And it is felt as a painful irony in the poem that Coleridge himself remains quite innocent of both fictions and deliberateness. Instead, he plays – ingeniously and with simple, charming expedients; like a fairy in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Coleridge reveals 'mysteries' and 'gorgeous sights'. This portrait would be in danger of becoming patronising if it were not for Wordsworth's admission that this companion is a teacher:

He would have taught you how you might employ
 Yourself; and many did to him repair,—
 And certes not in vain; he had inventions rare.

It sounds almost perfect: Coleridge's inventiveness constantly staves off boredom and, at the same time, it gives employment, not merely entertaining but directing his hearers. No wonder that 'many did to him repair'. Yet in the conditionals – 'He *would* have taught you how you *might* employ / Yourself' (my emphases) – something intervenes. Coleridge is pictured holding out possibilities that his companions cannot reach. This might be read as the Socratic method, as Coleridge suggesting enough to engender in his audience the response he cannot instill. Certainly, others spoke of Coleridge's conversation as having this effect and the practice conforms to his ideas about education generally. Yet Wordsworth phrases the matter so that this positive idea is held back by the fear that Coleridge was ineffectual. The 'would' and the 'might' condemn him to inhabiting a world of idealism that will never have an impact on the everyday. Wordsworth catches the tantalising ambiguity of his closest friend: the infuriating skill with which he refused to be committed coupled with his effortless, enticing charm; the intractable conundrum of how much he offered compared with how little he actually gave. The poem catches as well Wordsworth's desire to be equally free and his suspicion, suggested by

the verse-form, that such freedom cannot be possessed in this world. The poem became quite well-known and the two protagonists were recognised quite early on as Wordsworth and Coleridge. It does not, however, establish an iconography for Coleridge which subsequent writers repeat – de Quincey's portrait and even Shelley's are more influential in that respect. Rather, the 'Stanzas' reveal exactly the difficulties and attractions that all of Coleridge's contemporaries discovered when they tried to describe him.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1772 Samuel Taylor Coleridge born on 21 October in Ottery St. Mary, Devon, the youngest of ten children. His father, Rev. John Coleridge, is rector of the parish and headmaster of its grammar school.
- 1778 C attends grammar school in Ottery St. Mary.
- 1781 Death of C's father on 4 October; on his death, the family lose their home, their source of income and their status.
- 1782 C enrolls at Christ's Hospital in September, after spending six weeks in the summer at the preparatory school in Hertfordshire. He becomes the classmate of Valentine Le Grice and Robert Allen, and becomes friends with Thomas Middleton and Charles Lamb.
- 1785 C's brothers, Luke (1765-90) and George (1764-1828), arrive in London, Luke to study medicine and George as a schoolteacher.
- 1787 Luke qualifies as a doctor and returns to Devon, increasing C's loneliness.
- 1788 Allen and C visit the London home of Tom Evans, a younger pupil at Christ's Hospital; there C meets Mary Evans and falls in love with her. C is elected deputy Grecian.
- 1790 Death of Luke from fever.
- 1791 C made senior Grecian and awarded a School Exhibition to take him to Cambridge, plus the Rustat Scholarship, reserved for sons of clergymen who show outstanding merit. Death of C's sister, Ann (Nancy) from consumption. In September, C goes up to Jesus College, Cambridge where he meets up again with Thomas Middleton. He spends Christmas in London with the Evans family.
- 1792 In July, C wins Browne prize for a Greek Ode, his subject the slave-trade; after spending the summer in Devon, he returns to Cambridge; in December he competes for the Craven scholarship and is placed in the last four.
- 1793 In May, C attends the trial of William Frend in the Senate House in Cambridge; he spends the summer vacation in Devon and returns to Cambridge in the autumn. C meets Christopher Wordsworth at a literary society in Trinity College but attends the university irregularly,

- spending more time in London. In December, now seriously in debt, C enlists in the 15th Light Dragoons under the name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbach.
- 1794 C is discharged from the regiment on 10 April and returns to Cambridge; on 15 June, C and Joseph Hucks set off on a walking-tour of Wales; on 17 June, in Oxford, C meets Southey for the first time, staying in the city until 5 July. On 5 August, without Hucks, C arrives in Bristol where he meets Robert Lovell, Southey and Southey's circle, including Joseph Cottle, Thomas Poole and Sara Fricker. Pantisocracy is planned and forwarded energetically throughout the autumn. C returns to Cambridge for the Michaelmas term, publishes *The Fall of Robespierre* (co-written with Southey) and goes to London over Christmas. He lodges at *The Salutation and Cat* and spends time with Charles Lamb.
- 1795 C moves back to Bristol with Southey and shares a house with him and George Burnett, another Pantisocrat. He and Southey make money by giving public lectures, while arranging and later disagreeing about their proposed emigration. In June, C and Southey visit Tintern Abbey with Cottle. On 1 September, Southey leaves their shared lodging, abandoning Pantisocracy. C marries Sara Fricker on 4 October and moves to a cottage at Clevedon. In November he publishes *Conciones ad Populum* and begins work on *The Watchman*. During the autumn he meets William Wordsworth.
- 1796 On 9 January, C leaves Bristol to tour the Midlands, promoting *The Watchman*; he meets Erasmus Darwin and Joseph Wright, the painter, during the tour. *The Watchman* appears, in ten numbers, between March and May; in April, C publishes *Poems on Various Subjects*. Hartley Coleridge is born on 19 September; C continues living and working in Bristol, helped financially by Thomas Poole, tutoring Charles Lloyd and carrying on correspondences with John Thelwall and Wordsworth. In late December, C and his family make the long-awaited move to a cottage at Nether Stowey.
- 1797 C spends the spring preparing a second edition of *Poems* and writing his verse-drama, *Osorio*. In April, Wordsworth visits the cottage and in June, C visits Wordsworth and Dorothy at Racedown. In July, all three are back in Nether Stowey, where they are joined first by Lamb and later by Thelwall. The Wordsworths lease Alfoxden House, near to Nether Stowey. C writes 'Kubla Khan' in the autumn; he and Wordsworth discuss *The Ancient Mariner*; in December *Osorio* is rejected by London theatres.

- 1798 C considers taking post as Unitarian minister and preaches at Shrewsbury where he meets Hazlitt. Tom and Josiah Wedgwood offer him an annuity of £150 which C accepts. He continues to write radical journalism for the *Morning Post* and completes *The Ancient Mariner* and *Fears in Solitude*. In May, his second son Berkeley Coleridge is born; on 18 September *Lyrical Ballads* appears; two days earlier, C, Wordsworth and Dorothy had set sail from Yarmouth bound for Hamburg. C spends the winter in Ratzeburg, while the Wordsworths stay in Goslar.
- 1799 In February, Berkeley Coleridge dies; C does not hear the news until early April, by which time he is at the University of Göttingen. He goes on a walking-tour of the Hartz with Clement Carlyon and does not return to England until July. (The Wordsworths had come home in May.) On his return, C is reconciled with Southey who is married to Edith Fricker, Sara's sister. In September, the two couples pay a visit to C's relations in Devon. On their return, C takes part in Davy's experiments with laughing-gas; in late October, he travels with Cottle to the Lake District to meet Wordsworth. On this journey, C encounters Sara Hutchinson ('Asra'). In late November, he travels to London and begins working full-time for Daniel Stuart, editor of the *Morning Post*.
- 1800 From January to April, C is in London, working as a journalist and translating Schiller's *Wallenstein*. When the work is substantially complete, C moves back to Lake District, taking Sara with him. The first part of the translation, *The Piccolomini*, appears in April, the second, *The Death of Wallenstein*, in June. On 24 July, the family move into Greta Hall, near Keswick. C and Wordsworth spend the summer working on a second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*; C's major contribution, *Christabel*, remains unfinished, however, and cannot be included. C becomes increasingly unwell during the winter.
- 1801 *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) appears early in the year; C's health does not improve. C composes 'metaphysical letters' to Josiah Wedgwood but publishes very little; his marriage becomes more unhappy and his attachment to 'Asra' grows stronger. Financial difficulties increase. In November 1801, C is back in London, writing more journalism for Daniel Stuart.
- 1802 Until March, C remains in London, writing for *Morning Post*; he attends lectures by Humphry Davy; on return to Keswick, C writes 'A Letter to —', the first version of 'Dejection: An Ode'. During the summer, C is ill and his marriage difficult; he goes on a strenuous walking-tour of Lake District and writes letters to William Sotheby about disagreements over poetry with Wordsworth. 'Dejection' is published

- in *Morning Post* on October 4, Wordsworth's wedding-day and C's wedding anniversary. C visits London in November and tours Wales with Tom Wedgwood; in December, Sara Coleridge is born.
- 1803 In January and February, C moves between Bristol, Nether Stowey and Gunville in Dorset, visiting Southey, Poole and the Wedgwoods. He visits Lamb in London before returning to Keswick in April. He is still publishing little – articles in the *Morning Post*, a reprint of his *Poems* – and unhappily married; C tours Scotland in August, first with William and Dorothy Wordsworth, later on his own, and returns to Grasmere on 15 September. Southey moves to Keswick with Edith and children; C remains there planning trip abroad. He departs in December but spends Christmas in Grasmere with Wordsworths.
- 1804 C in London by the end of January; he writes a few articles for Stuart's *Courier* and sits for his portrait, before leaving for Malta on 9 April. On 18 May, he arrives, stays for a while with the Stoddarts before moving into Governor's residence on 6 July. C is made Private Secretary to the Governor, Sir Alexander Ball. In August, C visits Sicily, returning to Malta in November; he climbs Etna and prepares governmental reports.
- 1805 C is made Public Secretary and kept busy in Malta until September; John Wordsworth's death in February affects C profoundly when he learns of it in March. C leaves Malta on 23 September, travelling home via Naples which he reaches on 20 November. On 25 December, C leaves Naples for Rome.
- 1806 In Rome, C meets Washington Allston, who begins a portrait, and several important writers: Washington Irving, Ludwig Tieck, and A. W. Schlegel. He remains until May, travels north to Florence and sails for England from Leghorn on 23 June. C arrives back in England on 20 August but postpones journey north until 9 October; C reaches Keswick in early November, demands a separation from Sara and spends Christmas at Coleorton with Wordsworths.
- 1807 Until April, C remains at Coleorton; Wordsworth reads him *The Prelude* and C writes 'Lines to William Wordsworth'; C goes to London in April; in June, he joins his wife and children at Nether Stowey; in August, he is in Bristol where he meets Thomas de Quincey. In September, Sara and the children go back to Keswick, while C stays in Bristol until late November; then to London.
- 1808 C lives at the *Courier*'s office and gives lecture-series at the Royal Institution; he is ill and has to postpone several of the lectures. Wordsworth visits him in February, aiming to bring him back to Gras-

- mere. In July, C leave London, visits the Clarkson's in Bury St Edmunds and arrives at Allan Bank, the Wordsworths new home, in September. In autumn, he begins planning *The Friend*.
- 1809 C lives at Allan Bank and publishes weekly numbers of *The Friend* from 1 June. The controversy over the government's policy of appeasement produces Wordsworth's pamphlet, 'The Convention of Cintra' and C's 'Letters on the Spaniards' in the *Courier* in December 1809 and January 1810.
- 1810 The last number of *The Friend* appears on 15 March; Sara Hutchinson leaves Grasmere; C lingers through the summer before leaving for London in October with the Montagus. Quarrel between C and Wordsworth. C leaves the Montagus and moves in with the Morgans, friends from his Bristol days. In November, C meets Henry Crabb Robinson.
- 1811 C's Pantisocracy friend, George Burnett, dies in February. From March until December, C contributes to and sub-edits the *Courier*, writing ninety articles in that time. In April, he meets John Taylor Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge. In November, C begins lecturing at rooms belonging to the London Philosophical Society. At Southey's invitation, John Payne Collier takes shorthand notes.
- 1812 C continues living in the Morgan household; in May, Crabb Robinson and Lamb patch up quarrel between Wordsworth and C. C gives further lectures from May to August and reprints *The Friend* in June. In November, Josiah Wedgwood withdraws C's annuity; C begins lecture series on Shakespeare at the Surrey Institution in November.
- 1813 C's play, *Remorse* (a new version of *Osorio*), is performed at Drury Lane from 23 January and enjoys a successful run of twenty nights. Three editions of the play appear during the year. C meets Mme de Staël in September; in October, John Morgan's business collapses; Morgan escapes to Ireland and C takes the family to Bristol, where he meets old friends and lectures on Shakespeare and education.
- 1814 During the winter, C suffers more than ever from opium addiction; in April, he begins writing letters again and lectures in Bristol on literary topics. Washington Allston completes portrait of C, who publishes 'On the Principles of Genial Criticism' in Bristol, before moving in September to join the Morgans near Bath. In December, C and the Morgans move to Calne, Wiltshire.
- 1815 C lives the whole year in Calne, dictating *Biographia Literaria* to John Morgan and preparing a collected edition of his poems, *Sibylline Leaves*.

- 1816 C goes to London in March, carrying MS of *Zapolya*. On 15 April, he places himself as a patient under Dr. James Gillman and moves into his house in Highgate. *Christabel* is published in May; the 'Statesman's Manual' in December.
- 1817 C continues in Highgate, publishes 'A Lay Sermon' in April, *Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves* in July, and *Zapolya* in November. During the year, he meets his disciple Joseph Henry Green and Henry Cary, recent translator of Dante. C's publications attract hostile reviews from Hazlitt, Francis Jeffrey and John Wilson.
- 1818 C meets Thomas Allsop in January and gives lectures on poetry and drama from January to March; he publishes the three-volume edition of *The Friend* in November and begins lecturing in December on literature and the history of philosophy, at the 'Crown and Anchor' in the Strand.
- 1819 C's publishers are bankrupted in the spring. He gives his last course of lectures in March. In April, he meets Keats; in the same month, Hartley Coleridge is elected to a fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford. C begins connection with *Blackwood's Magazine* as an occasional contributor.
- 1820 Derwent and Hartley Coleridge visit C at Highgate in April; in May, Hartley is deprived of his fellowship. Derwent goes up to St John's College, Cambridge in October. In November, Lamb publishes 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' in the *London Magazine*.
- 1821 C continues to work with Green on 'magnum opus' but publishes little. There is a reunion with his brother George in July; though invited to lecture in Dublin, C declines the offer.
- 1822 C sets up his 'Thursday-evening class' in the spring; in November, Hartley becomes a schoolteacher at Ambleside after months of persuasion from C.
- 1823 In January and February, C's wife visits Highgate with their daughter, Sara. On 4 April, C dines with Wordsworth and others in London. He works during the year on *Aids to Reflection*. In November, the Gillmans move from Moreton House to 3, The Grove, establishing C in an attic study there.
- 1824 In March, C is awarded an annuity of £100 by the Royal Society of Literature. Carlyle and Gabriel Rossetti visit Highgate; John Taylor Coleridge becomes editor of the *Quarterly Review*.
- 1825 *Aids to Reflection* is published in May but receives little attention. C

- proposes lectures on education to the founders of the University of London and essays on religion to his publisher, Hessey.
- 1826 C anxious about Derwent Coleridge's proposed marriage; his own work concentrates on religious matters. In July, C learns of Henry Nelson Coleridge's engagement to Sara. In September, Sara visits C and in October, Derwent is ordained deacon.
- 1827 On 4 February, C is visited for the first time by J. A. Heraud, an ardent disciple. C publishes poems in *Annual Register* of 1827 (and succeeding years). In August, John Sterling visits C and in December, Derwent marries Mary Pridham.
- 1828 The death of Lord Liverpool on 27 February robs C of his chance of £200 sinecure. C dines with Scott on 22 April, meets Wordsworth again and joins him and Dora on their trip to the Netherlands and the Rhine from 21 June to 7 August. His *Poetical Works* in three volumes appear in August. In autumn, C is repeatedly sick and fears death. In December, he raises money for John Morgan's widow and daughter.
- 1829 C is ill again during the spring; Galignani publish *Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* in the summer; on September 3, Sara marries Henry Nelson Coleridge; the couple move to London. In December, C publishes *On the Constitution of the Church and State*.
- 1830 A second edition of *Church and State* appears in April; reviews are favourable. In June, Henry Nelson and Sara Coleridge settle in Hampstead; Henry resumes his collection of C's table-talk, after break of nearly three years. On 19 September, Hazlitt dies.
- 1831 A second edition of *Aids to Reflection* appears and is well-received. C meets Wordsworth for the last time. In May, C's grant from the Royal Society of Literature is withdrawn. John Stuart Mill visits C on 23 September.
- 1832 C's health in decline; he is visited by Walter Savage Landor; in September, Moses Laughton paints C's portrait; Sir Walter Scott dies in the same month.
- 1833 Hartley Coleridge publishes his *Poems*, dedicated to C. C visits Cambridge in June and is visited in August by Emerson.
- 1834 Sara Coleridge gives birth to twins who survive for two days. C's *Poetical Works*, 3rd edition, appears in 3 volumes between March and July; Sara Hutchinson visits Highgate on 8 May; C has last recorded conversation with Henry Nelson Coleridge on 5 July and dies on 25 July.

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The following extracts are reproduced in facsimile. Breaks between excerpts (which may cover paragraphs or whole volumes) are indicated by three asterisks

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In order to fit texts comfortably to the pages of this edition certain liberties have been taken with the format of the original: occasionally right-hand pages have become left-hand pages (and vice versa) and text from consecutive pages has been fitted onto a single page. Endnotes in this edition refer to Pickering & Chatto page and line numbers. Readers wishing to consult the passages in the original are referred to the table below.

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1.	<i>CUL</i>	III: 32-43	3
2.	<i>CUL</i>	I: 93-8	17
3.	<i>CUL</i>	29-31, 47-8	25
4.	<i>CUL</i>	II: 23-7, 30-3	31
5.	<i>CUL</i>	62-5, 68-74	42
6.	<i>CUL</i>	300-4	54
7.	<i>SJL</i>	v-xi	62
8.	<i>CUL</i>	13-24	70
9.	<i>CUL</i>	December 1834, 605-7	84
10.	<i>CUL</i>	I: 509-20, 593-6, 689-90; II: 3-5	89
11.	<i>CUL</i>	I: xii-xxvi	110
12.	<i>CUL</i>	II: 13-15, 25-7	127
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TEXT NO.	PROVENANCE	ORIGINAL PAGE NUMBERS	P&C page no. ff
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21.	CUL	I: 98-101; II: 306-7, 309-10, 443-4, 447-8	267
22.	SJL	52-62	278
23.	CUL	II: 408-9; IV: 381-2	291
24.	CUL	16-20	296
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26.	CUL	I: 107-17, 130-7	315
27.	CUL	48-53	335
28.	CUL	121-5, 128-30	343
29.	CUL	I: 369-73, 393-7	353
30.	CUL	321-9	365
31.	CUL	I: 172-3, 175-7	377
32.	CUL	119-21	383

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[Thomas Love Peacock], *Melincourt*, 3 vols (London, 1817) Vol. III: pp. 32-43

In April 1816, Coleridge became a permanent resident in Highgate, the guest and patient of Dr James Gillman. The move was another attempt to escape the 'detested Poison' of opium (Griggs, IV, p. 628) and though not completely successful, it did bring his intake under better control. From Highgate, Coleridge continued the energetic programme of writing and publishing on which he had been working for the previous few months. His pamphlet of poems – *Christabel: Kubla Khan, A Vision; The Pains of Sleep* (London: John Murray, 1816) – was published in May and reprinted twice by June; the first of the 'Lay Sermons', *The Statesman's Manual*, appeared in December, the second, *A Lay Sermon*, in March 1817. They were followed by *Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves* (both 1817). In the same year, his play *Remorse* was revived and his 'dramatic poem' *Zapolya* published. This astonishing, concerted effort on Coleridge's part was completed by his republishing *The Friend* in a three-volume edition in November 1818.

Before 1816, Coleridge's most recently published books were a reprint of his *Poems* in 1803, a reprint of *The Friend* in 1812 and copies of *Remorse* in 1813. Though still a bankable (if unreliable) lecturer, Coleridge had made very little impression as a writer for about ten years. His reception when he began to publish again was loud and rather violent. William Hazlitt made a point of reviewing everything Coleridge produced and did so with a volatile mixture of outrage, abusiveness and respect. Francis Jeffrey, the powerful editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, pursued him through its pages by commissioning articles which he then tampered with or added to himself (see Ashton, pp. 296-303, 316-18 and Jackson, I, pp. 295-322).

Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) wrote three of his seven novels in the same period, 1816 to 1818. Each of them – *Headlong Hall* (1816), *Melincourt, or Sir Oran Haut-ton* (1817) and *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) – is a satire on contemporary intellectual and political life and each includes a portrait of Coleridge: 'Mr Panscope' in *Headlong Hall*, 'Mr Flosky' in *Nightmare Abbey* and the character presented in this extract from *Melincourt*: 'Mr Mystic' of 'Cimmerian Lodge'. Each of them speaks a species of incomprehensible and mystified jargon based to a greater or lesser extent on the style of Coleridge's *Lay Sermons*. 'Mr Mystic' follows Coleridge's arguments most nearly, as is appropriate in *Melincourt*, where contemporary, political commentary predominates. Peacock's other novels are less specific and, in some ways, more genial and dispassionate; there, 'Mr Flosky' and 'Mr Panscope', though

evidently based on Coleridge, draw away from him towards a satire on the academic, theoretical mind in general.

Nonetheless, political hostility to Coleridge underlies all of the novels. Peacock, a friend of Shelley, was a learned, largely self-taught man, who lived off a private income until 1819 (when he joined the East India Office). His own loyalties were liberal, enlightened and anti-religious, so that the Coleridge of 1816 (Tory, Anglican and notoriously difficult to understand) aroused some of his most amused and amusing hostility (see Butler, pp. 13-15). More measured than Hazlitt, more perceptive than the reviewers, Peacock's versions of Coleridge pinpoint the weaknesses of his arguments. They do so, however, without descending into the personal attacks of Hazlitt or the *Edinburgh*. 'I never trespassed on private life,' Peacock wrote in a Preface to *Melincourt* written in 1856, but 'shadowed' the 'opinions and public characters' of his disputants (quoted Butler, p. 17). His critiques, though not based on personal knowledge, are exact as well as witty. They show in its best light, perhaps, the world of sceptical, advanced opinion which Coleridge was pitting himself against in the second half of his career. And, though not reminiscences themselves, they reveal an image of the man which personal reminiscence aimed either to confirm or refute.

They went steadily on through the dense and heavy air, over waters that slumbered like the Stygian pool; a chorus of frogs, that seemed as much delighted with their own melody, as if they had been an oligarchy of poetical critics, regaling them all the way with the Aristophanic symphony of BREK-EK-EK-EX! KO-AX! KO-AX*! till the boat fixed its keel in the *Island of Pure Intelligence*; and Mr. Mystic landed his party, as Charon did Æneas and the Sibyl, in a bed of weeds and mud †: after floundering in which for some time, from

* See the *Bargazoi* of Aristophanes.

† Informi limo glaucâque exponit in ulvâ,

losing their guide in the fog, they were cheered by the sound of his voice from above, and scrambling up the bank, found themselves on a hard and barren rock ; and, still following the sound of Mr. Mystic's voice, arrived at Cimmerian Lodge.

The fog had penetrated into all the apartments : there was fog in the hall, fog in the parlour, fog on the staircases, fog in the bedrooms ;

“ The fog was here, the fog was there,
The fog was all around.”

It was a little rarefied in the kitchen, by virtue of the enormous fire ; so far, at least, that the red face of the cook shone through it, as they passed the kitchen-door, like the disk of the rising moon through the vapours of an autumnal river : but to make amends for this, it was condensed almost into solidity in the

library, where the voice of their invisible guide bade them welcome to the *adytum* of the LUMINOUS OBSCURE.

Mr. Mystic now produced what he called his *synthetical torch*, and requested them to follow him, and look over his grounds. Mr. Fax said it was perfectly useless to attempt it in such a state of the atmosphere ; but Mr. Mystic protested it was the only state of the atmosphere in which they could be seen to advantage : as daylight and sunshine utterly destroyed their beauty.

They followed the “ darkness visible ” of the *synthetical torch*, which, according to Mr. Mystic, *shed around it the rays of transcendental illumination* ; and he continued to march before them, walking, and talking, and pointing out innumerable images of singularly nubilous beauty, though Mr. Forester and Mr. Fax both declared they could see no-

thing but the fog and “*la pale lueur du magique flambeau* :” till Mr. Mystic observing that they were now in a *Spontaneity free from Time and Space*, and at the point of *Absolute Limitation*, Mr. Fax said he was very glad to hear it; for in that case they could go no further. Mr. Mystic observed that they must go further; for they were entangled in a maze, from which they would never be able to extricate themselves without his assistance; and he must take the liberty to tell them, that *the categories of modality were connected into the idea of absolute necessity*. As this was spoken in a high tone, they took it to be meant for a reprimand; which carried the more weight as it was the less understood. At length, after floundering on another half hour, the fog still thicker and thicker, and the torch still dimmer and dimmer,

they found themselves once more in Cimmerian Lodge.

Mr. Mystic asked them how they liked his grounds, and they both repeated they had seen nothing of them : on which he flew into a rage, and called them *empirical psychologists*, and *slaves of definition, induction, and analysis*, which he intended for terms of abuse, but which were not taken for such by the persons to whom he addressed them.

Recovering his temper, he observed that it was nearly the hour of dinner; and as they did not think it worth while to be angry with him, they contented themselves with requesting that they might dine in the kitchen, which seemed to be the only spot on the *Island of Pure Intelligence* in which there was a glimmer of light.

Mr. Mystic remarked that he thought this very bad taste, but that he should have no

objection if the cook would consent; who, he observed, had paramount dominion over that important division of the *Island of Pure Intelligence*. The cook, with a little murmuring, consented for once to evacuate her citadel as soon as the dinner was on table; entering, however, a protest, that this infringement on her privileges should not be pleaded as a precedent.

Mr. Fax was afraid that Mr. Mystic would treat them as Lord Peter treated his brothers: that he would put nothing on the table, and regale them with a dissertation on the *pure idea of absolute substance*; but in this he was agreeably disappointed; for the *anticipated cognition* of a good dinner very soon smoked before them, in the *relation of determinate co-existence*; and the *objective phenomenon* of some superexcellent Madeira quickly put the whole party in perfect good-humour. It appeared, indeed, to have a