
THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

**SAMUEL TAYLOR
COLERIDGE**

VOLUME 1
1794–1834

Edited by
J. R. de J. JACKSON



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VOLUME 1, 1794–1834

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SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

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J.R.DE J.JACKSON



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General Editor's Preface

The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near-contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly for many of the highly-productive and lengthily-reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality—perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.

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My obligations to previous studies of Coleridge's reputation will be obvious throughout this volume. Laurence Wynn's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation ('The Reputation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge Among His Contemporaries in England', Princeton 1951), deserves particular mention for having provided a very helpful starting point. I am grateful to the following institutions for answering letters of inquiry or furnishing photographic copies of scarce reviews: the Library, Queen's University, Belfast; Yale University Library; the British Museum Newspaper Library, Colindale. The North Library of the British Museum, where most of the work was done, was a haven of efficiency and co-operation. Professor George Whalley and Eric Rothstein kindly solved puzzles which had baffled me; my wife's help has made the drudgery of proof-reading a pleasure.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

Certain alterations have been made in the materials presented in this volume. Obvious printers' errors have been silently corrected; lengthy quotations which were merely repetitive have been omitted, but the omissions are indicated; decorative capital letters at the opening of reviews, long 's's', titles and abbreviations have been made to conform with modern usage. Page references in the reviews have been deleted and redundant punctuation has been pruned. The spelling of Shakespeare's name has been made uniform. Original footnotes are indicated by a star (*) or a dagger (†); square brackets within quotations indicate the reviewer's insertions—elsewhere they draw attention to editorial corrections.

The following forms of reference have been used:

BL: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J.Shawcross (London 1907), 2 vols.

CL: *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford 1956–), 4 vols.

Howe: *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P.Howe (London and Toronto 1930–4), 21 vols.

Hayden: John O.Hayden, *The Romantic Reviewers 1802–1824* (London 1969).

Nangle: Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review Second Series 1790–1815* (Oxford 1955).

PW: *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford 1912), 2 vols.

Wellesley Index: *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*, ed. Walter E.Houghton (London and Toronto 1966–), 1 vol.

Introduction

I

Reviewers are remembered for their mistakes. When they recognize genius we imagine that it must have been self-evident; when they do not we suppose them to have been wilfully obtuse. One has only to add our common assumption that what we regard as great literature must be great in some absolute sense, to see why they occupy such a humble place in literary history.

The relationship of a writer to his reviewers is generally discussed from the writer's point of view. Looked at from the point of view of the reviewer, however, it takes on a different aspect. The reviewer's job, after all, is to read what is published, the bad as well as the good, and to select for his contemporaries the few works which he thinks they will enjoy. If he is high-minded he will also feel it his duty to draw to their attention works which they may not like at first but which he believes are nevertheless of merit. He is forced by the conditions of his profession to read rapidly and widely and to expose his reactions immediately in print. The more original and demanding a work is, the harder it is for him to respond to it adequately.

The reviews of a previous age provide us with an excellent introduction to the intellectual climate and literary taste which prevailed during it, but they also remind us that recognizing talent has always been a chancy business. The Romantic period is one of the most interesting, because it was during it that the review as we now know it came into being. Within a span of about twenty years reviews developed from little more than descriptive notices into elaborate analyses which would do credit to any modern journal. The men who wrote them were often authors of distinction in their own right, and most of them were intelligent, well-read, and fair-minded.

Coleridge's career coincides with this phase in the emergence of the review, and looked at retrospectively it seems to be ideally calculated as a sort of reviewer's obstacle course. It contains all the pitfalls which beset the critic. As a poet he was innovative and eccentric; he published his verse in such a way as to conceal the chronology of his

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development; his prose was unrelentingly obscure in its expression and quixotically organized; and his political commitments and public personality both tended to divert attention from the works themselves. In the face of such handicaps it is remarkable that his contemporaries were able to make as much of him as they did. Where they fall short it is usually easy to see why.

The present collection is drawn entirely from reviews or general estimates of Coleridge which were written during his lifetime. At his death and in the years that followed there was a great wave of writing about him, much of it very good indeed; but these posthumous assessments lack the immediacy of reviews and belong to another chapter in the history of his reputation.

II

Coleridge first attracted the attention of the reviewers as a political controversialist. The publication in 1794 of a play called *The Fall of Robespierre*, which he and Robert Southey had written in collaboration, had suggested where his sympathies lay and had prompted questions about the propriety of dramatizing events that were so recent. But it was the series of lectures which he gave in Bristol in the spring of 1795, attacking the policies of the government, which identified him as a radical in the public mind.

Political feelings were running high at the time, and his bold decision to expound the iniquities of the slave trade in a city where handsome profits were being made by it accounts for the vehemence of his opponents. He described it in a letter to his friend George Dyer:

...the opposition of the Aristocrats is so furious and determined, that I begin to fear that the Good I do is not proportionate to the Evil I occasion—Mobs and Press gangs have leagued in horrible Conspiracy against me—The Democrats are as sturdy in the support of me—but their number is comparatively small—Two or three uncouth and unbrained Automata have threatened my Life—and in the last Lecture the Genus infimum were scarcely restrained from attacking the house in which the ‘damn’d Jacobine was jawing away’.

(CL, i, 152)

In the same letter he explained that charges of treason had obliged him to publish the first of the lectures unrevised.

The reactions of the reviewers to *A Moral and Political Lecture*, *Conciones ad Populum*, and *The Plot Discovered*, all of which appeared

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before the end of the year, depended, as one would expect, upon their various political sympathies. While the *Critical Review* (No. 4) spoke of his sentiments as ‘manly and generous’, the *British Critic* (No. 10) complained of ‘the petulance and irritability of youth, assertion without proof, and the absurdest deductions from the most false and unreasonable premises’. Most of the reviewers referred to the quality of Coleridge’s diction, calling it passionate and imaginative if they approved of what he was saying, and intemperate and overblown if they did not. These early publications were important factors in the development of Coleridge’s reputation, however, because they identified him with a particular political faction, and because the identification lingered on long after his views had changed.

The response to his *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796), by contrast, was tentative. Read in isolation from other reviews of the period it seems complimentary enough, —but the standard policy seems to have been to praise when in doubt, and to do so condescendingly. Coleridge anticipated one of the criticisms that was to be made when he sent a copy of the book to his friend John Thelwall: ‘You will find much to blame in them—much effeminacy of sentiment, much faulty glitter of expression’ (*CL*, i, 205). By and large the reviewers agreed, adding that his metres were not always harmonious; but they found much to admire—lively imagination, tenderness and sublimity of sentiment, and a ready command of poetic language. The *Monthly Review* (No. 15) singled out ‘Religious Musings’, on which Coleridge had told Thelwall that he built all his ‘poetic pretensions’, and described it as being ‘on the top of the scale of sublimity’.

Coleridge’s comment on his critics seems a trifle ungrateful: ‘The *Monthly* has cataracted panegyric on me—the *Critical* cascaded it—& the *Analytical* dribbled it with civility: as to the *British Critic*, they *durst not* condemn and they would not praise—so contented themselves with “commending me, as a *Poet* [”] —and allowed me “tenderness of sentiment & elegance of diction”’ (*CL*, i, 227). But his good-humoured indifference to their opinions probably rose as much from his feeling that reviews did not matter very much and from his confidence that he had better poetry in him as from dissatisfaction with their superficiality.

His next publications, the one-shilling pamphlet of his *Ode on the Departing Year* (1796) and the second edition of his *Poems* (1797), were less widely noticed. The reviewers of the ‘Ode’ agreed that its language was extravagant or affected, but differed as to whether or not

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his experiment with the form was successful. Writing to his publisher, Joseph Cottle, Coleridge refers to the poem 'which some people think superior to the "Bard" of Gray, and which others think a rant of turgid obscurity...' (CL, i, 309).

Fears in Solitude (1798) linked his poetical reputation to his political views even more firmly. In addition to the title poem the volume includes 'France, an Ode', and 'Frost at Midnight'. Although these have since come to be thought of as among his more successful poems, the reviewers did not sense any marked improvement. They concentrated on the sentiments which he expressed and praised or condemned them according to their own political bias. While the *Analytical Review* (No. 21) refers to him as a person of the 'purest patriotism', the *British Critic* (No. 23) laments 'his absurd and preposterous prejudices against his country'. As to the literary merits of the poems, the critics merely single out beauties and blemishes without committing themselves to anything amounting to analysis. All of them treat Coleridge as a poet of promise, while continuing to mention the unevenness of his work.

The reception of *Lyrical Ballads*, which Coleridge and Wordsworth published anonymously in 1798, is much more interesting. The anonymity of the volume prevented the reviewers from talking about Coleridge's politics; 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', which opened the collection, presented them with a marked departure from the sort of verse they were used to; and the short 'Advertisement' provided them with a poetical manifesto of sorts.

Coleridge's other contributions were 'The Nightingale', 'The Dungeon', and 'The Foster-Mother's Tale'. These were received with varying degrees of polite approval. 'The Ancient Mariner', however, was uniformly abused. The *Analytical Review* (No. 25) described the poem as having 'more of the extravagance of a mad german poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writers'. Southey, writing anonymously in the *Critical Review* (No. 26), remarked that 'Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful, but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible', and concluded that it was 'a Dutch attempt at German sublimity'. The *Monthly Review* (No. 27) was even blunter, calling it 'the strangest story of a cock and a bull that we ever saw on paper', but added that it contained 'poetical touches of an exquisite kind'. Indeed, while the reviewers agreed that 'The Ancient Mariner' was a failure, they spoke respectfully of its unknown author.

Before condemning them for failing to rise to the occasion, it is only fair to mention that when 'The Ancient Mariner' first appeared its

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diction was more archaic than it is in the familiar version, and it lacked the explanatory gloss. Further, Wordsworth, who had had a hand in the planning of the poem, seems on the whole to have agreed with the reviewers' strictures. Very few readers recognized the merits of the work immediately (No. 30).

With *Lyrical Ballads* we come to the end of the first phase of Coleridge's career. His visit to Germany in 1798–1799 bore fruit in his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, but he found translating to be so uncongenial that when the *Monthly Review* (No. 31) ventured to call him 'by far the most rational partizan of the German theatre whose labours have come under our notice', he objected. The reviews of *Wallenstein* provide further evidence of the respect being accorded to Coleridge's poetical skills, but they continue to comment upon his lapses from decorum.

III

Looking back over his literary life in 1817, Coleridge complained that, having been properly criticized for faults when he was publishing poetry, he had been harried unremittingly by the critics for faults which he did not have, during a period of seventeen years when he was not publishing poetry. He overstated the case a little, but he was essentially right.

With the exception of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and the third edition of his *Poems* (1803) there is a hiatus in Coleridge's career until 1813. He continued to write, but what he wrote was published in newspapers or annual anthologies. Even his own periodical, the *Friend* (1809–10), was not the sort of work which the reviews normally discussed. Having achieved something of a name for his political verse and his 'Conversation Poems', he suddenly stopped furnishing the reviewers with subject matter. Had he vanished from the literary stage completely he would probably have been left in peace; in fact, however, although the medium of his publications changed, his presence continued to be felt in London. He was active as a political journalist, first for the *Morning Post* and later for the *Courier*; in 1809 he began to give public lectures and continued to do so at irregular intervals until 1819; his fame as a talker began to spread beyond his circle of close friends. In addition, his former associates, Southey and Wordsworth, were writing a great deal, and it was only natural for

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reviewers referring to the characteristics of the Lake poets to toss Coleridge's name in with those of his friends.

Lord Byron's inclusion of Coleridge in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) would have surprised no one.

Shall gentle COLERIDGE pass unnoticed here,
To turgid ode and tumid stanza dear? Though
themes of innocence amuse him best, Yet still
Obscurity's a welcome guest. If Inspiration
should her aid refuse To him who takes a Pixy
for a muse, Yet none in lofty numbers can
surpass The bard who soars to elegize an ass:
So well the subject suits his noble mind, He
brays, the Laureate of the long-eared kind.

Had anyone made the objection that the verse which Byron was mocking belonged to the previous decade, he would have been perfectly justified in retorting that no matter when it was written Coleridge's reputation was based on it.

A similar line is taken in a lampoon published in the *Satirist* (No. 36a) in 1809, and the publication of two parts of 'The Three Graves' in the *Friend* was greeted by a long and archly ironical critique in the *Monthly Mirror* (No. 37) in 1810. In the same year the *Edinburgh Annual Register for 1808* (No. 36b) reproached Coleridge for his silence, complaining that 'He has only produced in a complete state one or two small pieces, and every thing else, begun on a larger scale, has been flung aside and left unfinished'. Even his lectures were not immune to the cheerful satire of the time. Leigh Hunt's description of them in 'The Feast of the Poets' touches on the discrepancy between the public Coleridge and the private one.

And Coleridge, they say, is excessively weak; Indeed
he has fits of the painfulest kind: He stares at
himself and his friends, till he's blind; Then describes
his own legs, and claps each a long stilt on; And this
he calls *lect'ring* on 'Shakspeare and Milton'.

During these years appreciative comments were rare. One of the few was a long, detailed, and enthusiastic review of *The Friend*, which appeared in the *Eclectic Review* (No. 38). Although Coleridge is reported to have written to the editor about it, his letter has not been found.¹The review deserves a careful reading as the first description of

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Coleridge's thought and prose style, and for its anticipations of later apologists. The author, said to be John Foster, begins by noticing the difference between the qualities of Coleridge's mind and those required for the successful production of a weekly journal. He admits the obscurity of Coleridge's style and the difficulty of his ideas without losing patience with either, and he concludes that they must have been partly responsible for the failure of *The Friend* to become popular. The essay closes with a plea to Coleridge to benefit the public with 'successive volumes of essays' and the advice that he submit to 'a resolute restriction on that mighty profusion and excursiveness of thought, in which he is tempted to suspend the pursuit and retard the attainment of the one distinct object which should be clearly kept in view...'. More than ten years were to pass before Coleridge was to be served as well by a reviewer.

His lectures on Shakespeare, his long silence as a poet, and the depressingly low state of the drama, combined to make the presentation of his tragedy, *Remorse*, on 25 January 1813, an event of unusual interest to the literary world. The play was well received on the first night, ran for twenty nights—at the time a long run—, was published at the end of the month, and went through three editions before the year was out. In terms of profit and public recognition it was Coleridge's most successful literary enterprise. In a letter to his friend Thomas Poole he mentions the profit: 'I shall get more than all my literary Labors put together, nay thrice as much, subtracting my heavy Losses in the Watchman & the Friend—400£: including the Copy-right' (*CL*, iii, 437). He was immediately caught up in a flurry of social engagements.

According to his own account the play succeeded 'in spite of bad Scenes, execrable Acting, & Newspaper Calumny' (*CL*, iii, 436). It is, of course, impossible to assess the quality of the performance now, but the reviews were not as bad as Coleridge thought. The *Morning Chronicle* (No. 39) praised the psychological refinement of the characterization, the variety and elegance of the diction, and even ventured to compare Coleridge with Shakespeare. The *Satirist* (No. 43) was so unkind as to suggest that Coleridge must have written the review himself. The short notice in the *Morning Post* (No. 40) was wholly favourable, although the longer review which was promised for the next issue failed to materialize. *The Times* (No. 41), however, was very cool and contemptuous and devoted most of the little praise it permitted itself to the efforts of the actors. Coleridge was vexed by this

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review, as much because it contained references to his sentimental and German manner as because it was unfavourable. He vented his indignation in a letter to Southey:

...that was one big *Lie* which the Public cried out against—they were force[d] to affect admiration of the Tragedy—but yet abuse me they must—& so comes the old infamous Crambe bis millies cocta of the ‘sentimentalities, puerilities, winnings, and meannesses (both of style & thought)’ in my former Writings—but without (which is worth notice both in these Gentlemen, & in all our former Zoili), without one single Quotation or Reference in proof or exemplification.... This Slang has gone on for 14 or 15 years, against us—& really deserves to be exposed. (*CL*, iii, 433)

These remarks anticipate Coleridge’s later fulminations in *Biographia Literaria*.

Reviews of the published version of *Remorse* considered its merits as a dramatic poem—a genre that was enjoying a temporary vogue while the theatre was weak. The reviewers all found beautiful poetry in the play, and most of them felt that it was more suitable for reading than for acting (it is worth remembering that a number of Romantic critics said the same of Shakespeare’s plays). Only the *British Review* (No. 54) was so tactless as to assert that *Remorse* owed its success to the stage performance. The comparison with Shakespeare was taken up by the *Monthly Review* (No. 53), but the prevailing opinion was that the play contained too much description, too much reflective soliloquy, too little action, and too involved and improbable a plot. The most elaborate discussion, a long essay in the *Quarterly Review* (No. 55), expressed surprise that *Remorse* had been well received in performance and prophesied accurately that it was unlikely to hold the stage.

IV

The years 1816 to 1817 mark a change in the public reception of Coleridge’s work. After a long interval of silence, broken towards the end by the publication of *Remorse*, he suddenly produced half a dozen books in quick succession. In the summer of 1816, *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*, *a Vision*; *The Pains of Sleep* appeared and rapidly went through three editions. It was followed in December by *The Statesman’s Manual* and in April 1817 by his second *Lay Sermon*. *Biographia Literaria*, *Sibylline Leaves*, and *Zapolya* were published before the end of the year.

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The immediate reaction to this spate of activity was breathtakingly hostile. It had an adverse effect on sales at a time when Coleridge was desperately poor, and it included attacks on his personal integrity at the very moment when he was beginning to emerge from the depths of his opium addiction in the kindly and well-regulated household of the Gillmans in Highgate. A number of these reviews would deserve a place in any collection of notorious literary attacks. They are notorious partly because critics have disagreed with them since, but mainly because they are splendid examples of invective. The authors of these criticisms were all highly qualified and intelligent men; looked at dispassionately, after a century and a half, they do not even seem to have been particularly ill-natured. Nevertheless, the treatment of Coleridge's writing during this period is one of the sorriest performances in the history of reviewing. A word of explanation seems to be in order.

As Coleridge himself had already become aware, there had been a change in the manners of reviewing; attacks on Wordsworth and Southey had alerted him to it as early as 1808. There had been an appreciable difference between the tone of the reviews which greeted *Remorse* and those which his own poems had received in the 1790's. The foundation of the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, and later of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, ushered in an era of literary partisanship and provocation. Hazlitt, who was particularly active as a reviewer, looked back nostalgically to a time when critics 'were somewhat precise and prudish, gentle almost to a fault, full of candour and modesty, "And of their port as meek as is a maid"'. 'There was', he said, 'none of that Drawcansir work going on then that there is now; no scalping of authors, no hacking and hewing of their lives and opinions...' (Howe, viii. 216). It was Coleridge's misfortune to present the bulk of his writing to the public at the very time when the cut and thrust of reviewing was at its height.

Apart from this change in the conduct of the reviews, there were reasons why Coleridge was particularly vulnerable. The new journals were identified with political parties; Coleridge, having been a radical and having since become conservative, was distrusted by both sides and caught in the cross-fire between them. He was known to favour German philosophy at a time when Scottish philosophy was in fashion. Associated with the Lake poets' earliest experiments, he had been named as a poet of mawkish

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sentimentality, and he was about to offer new poems which seemed obscure and pretentiously Gothic. Further, he was well-known and was therefore fair game for abuse.

Christabel was published as a four-and-sixpenny pamphlet in a brown paper cover. Of the three poems which it contained, two were unfinished, and one of these, 'Kubla Khan', was offered as a psychological curiosity which had been composed in a dream. Taken by itself the volume seems modest enough. As various reviewers were to remark, however, 'Christabel' had been preceded by the 'puff direct', Byron having referred to it in his preface to *The Siege of Corinth* as 'That wild and singularly original and beautiful poem'. It had been read to or by many literary men during the sixteen years which intervened between its composition and its publication and had even been parodied in the *European Magazine* the year before.² Like its author, the poem already had a reputation.

Coleridge could hardly have asked for a more sympathetic review than the first one, which appeared in the *Critical Review* (No. 58); the gist of it was that the collection contained great beauty amid imperfections. It refers to 'Christabel', which it discusses in some detail, as 'this very graceful and fanciful poem, which we may say, without fear of contradiction, is enriched with more beautiful passages than have ever been before included in so small a compass'. It mentions 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Pains of Sleep' briefly but respectfully.

The next review established the tone for those that followed. In the *Examiner* (No. 59) Hazlitt set out to mock the volume. 'Christabel', like 'The Three Graves', is an easy poem to make fun of if one has a mind to, and Hazlitt assumes an air of playful condescension and regret. He makes a few perceptive observations about 'Christabel', admits its beauties, and quotes twenty-eight lines approvingly. Even his comment that "'Kubla Khan", we think, only shews that Mr. Coleridge can write better nonsense verses than any man in England', which is sometimes quoted disapprovingly out of context, is qualified by the assertion that 'It is not a poem but a musical composition', and the conclusion that 'We could repeat these lines to ourselves not the less often for not knowing the meaning of them'.

Thomas Moore's critique in the *Edinburgh Review* (No. 64) moves from condescension to high-spirited ridicule. He is by turns indignant and droll, and his trial of 'Christabel' by the standards of 'common sense' makes entertaining reading. His attack is framed by an opening salvo at the Lake poets and a closing broadside at Coleridge's political

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change of heart. Within this framework he gleefully abuses 'Christabel' and concludes that with the exception of six lines ('even these are not very brilliant') 'there is literally not one couplet in the publication... which would be reckoned poetry, or even sense, were it found in the corner of a newspaper or upon the window of an inn'. Such reviews tend to be self-defeating in the long run, but the combined effect of Moore's anonymous disapproval, the more restrained disappointment of other reviews, and the silence of the influential *Quarterly Review*, seems to have been to damage sales and to make it difficult for Coleridge to find publishers for his other works.

The reviews of *The Statesman's Manual* and the second *Lay Sermon* are less interesting to the modern reader because the works themselves are relatively unfamiliar. Nevertheless, the reception of these two essays into theological politics was to have a lasting effect on his reputation.

William Hazlitt played a disproportionately large part in the hostilities. He reviewed *The Statesman's Manual* anonymously three times, once before it was published (on the basis of a prospectus) and twice after (Nos. 67, 68 and 69). His unparalleled ferocity as a reviewer is such a diverting spectacle as to make one want to go back to the works he is deriding. Yet for all the scorn and contempt he expresses, it is plain, particularly in the light of his later essays on Coleridge, that it was Coleridge's falling away from the man whom he had once admired that has roused him. It is Coleridge the political turncoat, Coleridge the dabbler in incomprehensible German metaphysics, Coleridge the intolerant condemner of men and beliefs which he had formerly supported, that rankles. Hazlitt writes with such spirit and clarity, and his target was so open to raillery on the grounds of being obscure and paradoxical, that the formidable reviewer seems to have much the best of the encounter. As Crabb Robinson mildly pointed out, 'The author's great mistake has been, we apprehend, the supposing that the higher classes, "men of *clerkly* acquirements", would be willing to acquiesce in that kind of abstraction which has been produced by a school of metaphysics, foreign equally to our language and philosophy' (No. 71).

It was at this point that Coleridge joined battle with his tormentors. We do not yet know very much about the order in which the various parts of *Biographia Literaria* were written, but we do know that, although the book makes remarks about the specific inadequacies of Coleridge's own reviewers in 1816, it had contained a lengthy discussion

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of the shortcomings of contemporary reviewing as early as 1815. Three conclusions follow from this fact. The first is that Coleridge's complaints are not just those of an author who had himself been badly mauled. The second is that although we know this, with the advantage of hindsight, Coleridge's reviewers did not. And the third follows from the preceding two: a book meant as a serious commentary on the methods of reviewing was mistaken for a wholly personal riposte.

The publication of *Biographia Literaria* was a heavensent opportunity for the very reviewers whose influence it was supposed to undermine, and they took full advantage of it. Coleridge had singled out the *Edinburgh Review* and its editor, Jeffrey, for criticism. The answer was a masterful and scathing round of abuse from Hazlitt, accompanied by a lofty refutation of Coleridge's personal charges by Jeffrey himself in a long footnote (No. 75). Accusations of lack of organization, unintelligibility, disingenuousness and downright silliness are combined with remarks about the Lake poets and dishonest politics. The review concludes with the statement: 'Till he can do something better, we would rather hear no more of him'.

Worse was to come. The next major review, by 'Christopher North' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (No. 78), made Hazlitt's seem moderate and reasonable by comparison. To the charges of wilful obscurity, inconsistency, and political hypocrisy, are added attacks on Coleridge's conceit, spitefulness and domestic irregularities. The air throughout is that of a stern judge condemning a malefactor in highly personal terms. Coleridge was dissuaded with some difficulty from bringing an action for libel (*CL*, iv, 884-5).

The remaining reviews were much less extravagant in their disapproval, and some admitted that the autobiographical sections of the book were entertaining, but all agreed that a prominent writer had made a sorry spectacle of himself.

Considering the sharpness of the reception of *Biographia Literaria*, one would have expected that the publication of *Sibylline Leaves* about a month later would have given rise to another chorus of disapproval. In fact, the volume was not widely reviewed; and while a number of the old objections to Coleridge's sentimentalities, Germanic wildness, obscurities, and political change of heart were repeated, the comments were fairly gentle and in some instances positively favourable.

Sibylline Leaves is a collection of almost all the poetry on which Coleridge's reputation now rests. Omitted are 'Christabel', 'Kubla Kahn', and 'The Pains of Sleep', which, as we have seen, had been

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published separately the year before. The only new contributions of any importance were the explanatory gloss to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Dejection: an Ode'. But even if most of the poems were familiar, the book offered the reviewers a chance to write retrospectively about Coleridge. Their failure to do so can be most plausibly explained by their feeling that *Sibylline Leaves* was merely another edition of his verse, and by their already being taken up with the problem of coping with the *Biographia*—which must have been a difficult book to review, even with prejudice.

The *British Critic* (No. 80) mentioned *Sibylline Leaves* briefly in the course of its review of *Biographia Literaria*. The *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's* ignored it. The *Monthly Magazine* (No. 84) dismissed it in a short notice with the remark, 'Alas, poor Yorick!' Both the *Edinburgh Magazine* (No. 85) and the *Monthly Review* (No. 86) discussed it favourably, and in terms which remind one of the milder reviews of Coleridge's youth.

The *Edinburgh Magazine* mixes praise and blame fairly evenly. It picks 'The Ancient Mariner' as the most characteristic of Coleridge's poems (and this was one of the earliest public indications of its eventual prominence), and while it enumerates the defects of his style admits that his poetry has 'other qualities...which entitle it to a place among the finest productions of modern times'. The review refers to the variety of the poems in *Sibylline Leaves*, but argues that 'the prevailing characteristic of the compositions of this author is a certain wildness and irregularity'.

The *Monthly Review's* offering is more instructive. Its opinions about the relative merits of the poems are conventional, and its claim that 'Love' was the best of them was to be echoed in the 1820's. But it raises the question as to why Coleridge had failed to become a popular author and charges him with having had a corrupting effect on the taste of his contemporaries. These remarks go a long way towards explaining why Coleridge had been receiving such a bad press. The *Monthly Review* observes that the scattered way in which his work had been published showed little business sense, and complained that, unlike other poets of the age, he had written no long poems.³ It added that through his literary lectures and his own poems he had been 'gothicizing' his contemporaries and contributing to the decline of the reputation of the Augustan poets. It is unlikely that Coleridge could have had such an influence by himself, but he may have seemed to epitomize those who were turning away from Pope and Dryden. If so,

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it is easy to see why the rather old-fashioned literary tastes of the Edinburgh reviewers were offended.

Coleridge's last major publication in 1817 was *Zapolya*. Its failure to reach the stage of Covent Garden for which it was intended probably accounts for its having aroused so much less interest than *Remorse*. The reviewers disagreed over whether it was a good play or a bad play and over whether it was a good poem or a bad poem, but do not seem to have cared much one way or the other.

V

There was, inevitably one feels, a reaction against the severity of the reviews which Coleridge had received in 1816 and 1817. The aftermath was quiet but steadily favourable. In 1819 a long and perceptive re-appraisal of his poetry was published in *Blackwood's* by J.G.Lockhart (No. 95). A survey of Coleridge's life and works appeared in the *Examiner* (No. 99) in 1821; and a long letter which appeared in the *Edinburgh Magazine* (No. 93) in the same year belatedly drew attention to the qualities of the *Friend* (1818). Not very much was written about Coleridge between 1818 and 1825, when his next major publication, *Aids to Reflection*, came out, but with the exception of a waspish essay in the *Monthly Magazine* (No. 94) it tended to be complimentary.

Lockhart's essay (No. 95) deserves to be read carefully. It is a discussion of Coleridge's characteristics as a poet, and the views which it expresses were accepted until well into our own century. He stresses Coleridge's originality and oddness, arguing that these characteristics have stood between him and the public. He devotes considerable space to outlining the structure and meaning of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel' which, with 'Love', he classes as Coleridge's best poems. He describes Coleridge as 'the prince of superstitious poets' and 'a most inimitable master of the language of poetry'. It was for music and mystery that the next two generations were to value him.

It is tempting to accept Lockhart's essay as the amends due to an author who had been unfairly injured by other reviewers. But as the *London Magazine* was quick to point out, it was in *Blackwood's* itself that the fiercest attack on Coleridge's personal and literary character had appeared in 1817. A letter protesting against the review of *Biographia Literaria* had been printed in *Blackwood's* in 1819, as had a parody of 'Christabel' and a hoax letter which purported to come

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from Coleridge. All of these *jeux d'esprit* had been written by the editorial staff of *Blackwood's*, of which Lockhart was himself a prominent member. As if this were not enough, *Blackwood's* was trying, through the good offices of Lockhart, to persuade Coleridge to become a contributor. These circumstances in no way invalidate Lockhart's essay—his praise of Coleridge's poems seems to have been perfectly genuine—, but they do reveal something of the frolicsome way in which the great reviews of the age were conducted.

By 1825 Coleridge's reputation as a poet was well established. He had become increasingly well known as a thinker and a number of his young disciples had become sufficiently prominent themselves to begin to write reviews of his work of the partisan kind which had previously been denied him. The suggestion that he had plagiarized from the Germans was made in a lighthearted context in *Blackwood's* (No. 101), but it was not until after Coleridge's death that De Quincey's articles on this topic began to require refutation. *Aids to Reflection* was not well received at first, but it must have seemed a very specialized book. The *British Review* (No. 102) opened its notice with the statement: 'We can recollect no instance, in modern times, of literary talent so entirely wasted...'. *The British Critic* (No. 103) gave it a long and circumstantial consideration and ended by disapproving of Coleridge's unorthodox religious views. But *Aids to Reflection*, like *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830) which also attracted little attention at first, gradually won adherents for reasons that were not primarily literary.

Three editions of Coleridge's *Poetical Works*, in 1828, 1829, and 1834, reflect the improvement in his reputation. Some fine reviews were written of these. One, in the *Westminster Review* (No. 106) in 1830, claimed him as a Utilitarian—a curious foreshadowing of John Stuart Mill's later essay on Coleridge and Bentham. The poems which continued to be praised were 'The Ancient Mariner', 'Christabel' and, above all, 'Love'. A month after Coleridge's death in 1834, Henry Nelson Coleridge's great essay appeared in the *Quarterly Review* (No. 114). It had been written before Coleridge died and it is obvious that H.N.Coleridge had benefited from his close association with his uncle. For the first time serious consideration was given to poems which Coleridge had written after 1800, and to 'Dejection: an Ode' in particular, and the necessary connection between his metaphysical pursuits and his poems was emphasized.

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VI

The war with France may have had something to do with Coleridge's failure to make any immediate impression abroad.⁴ The outbreak of hostilities made it difficult for Continental writers to keep in touch with their contemporaries in Britain, and forced them to rely on the opinions of the new reviews without having a lively sense of the social context in which they were being written. A Londoner might be expected to sense the biases of the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* and to allow for them; the foreign interpreter of English literature was obliged to accept them at face value. As the lull which followed the defeat of Napoleon happened to coincide with the worst phase of Coleridge's reputation, it is not surprising that little notice was taken of him either in Europe or in the United States until the 1820's.

In Germany, from which Coleridge had himself drawn so much inspiration, he was known as a missionary for Schiller's plays but for little else. An early review of his poetry which appeared in the Stuttgart *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* in 1811 was merely an adaptation of the essay in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* (No. 36(b)).⁵ F.J.Jacobsen's influential account of the state of English poetry, published in 1820, paid more attention to the work of Moore, Campbell and Wilson; most of the nine pages he allowed Coleridge were taken up with a reprinting of 'Love'.⁶ In 1832, Wolff's lectures on contemporary European literature reflected the improvement in Coleridge's English reputation, provided a translation of 'Love', but had nothing original to say.⁷ German readers had to wait until 1836 for F.Freilingrath's translation of 'The Ancient Mariner'.

In France, where Coleridge was later to have an influence on the Symbolist poets, his initial reception was even sketchier. Apart from comments derived from English reviewers, the earliest essay of substance seems to have been Amédée Pichot's in 1825.⁸ It presented Coleridge as a man of indolent genius and of improvised fragments, referred to his exploitation of dreams, and singled out 'Love', 'The Ancient Mariner' and *Remorse* for special praise. This essay and the 1829 Paris edition of *The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* anticipate the direction which French appreciation of Coleridge was to take.

Although Coleridge's name is used freely enough in American periodicals of the time, they contain surprisingly little direct comment on his writings. One comes upon announcements of his forthcoming lectures

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in London, sedulously copied from English journals, but nothing that could be called a review. In 1819, for instance, R.H. Dana, Sr., invoked his authority while talking about Hazlitt. 'Mr. Coleridge's criticism', he said, 'has more good taste and philosophy in it, than any that has been written upon Mr. Wordsworth, or any other man in modern times.'⁹ But when *Biographia Literaria* was published in New York in 1817, it had been allowed to pass almost unnoticed by the reviews of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Like the reviewers on the Continent, and with rather less excuse, American reviewers accepted the fashionable British opinion that Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth and Scott were the authors who mattered.

Towards the end of his life Coleridge's prose began to be championed by the Transcendentalists. The publication of *Aids to Reflection* in Vermont in 1829, with a long prefatory essay by James Marsh, opened the way for serious discussion. By 1835 two major essays had appeared in the *North American Review*.¹⁰

VII

When trying to assess the quality of previous critics it is tempting to suppose that whenever they disagree with us they must be wrong. We are sometimes a little precipitate in assuming the mantle of posterity. It is more satisfying to look into differences between their approach to a writer's work and our own. Coleridge's reviewers singled out 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel' as being especially remarkable, but it took them almost twenty years to come round to this view. 'Kubla Khan' was liked, but was not thought to be much more than the curiosity which Coleridge himself had called it. In the twentieth century his 'Conversation poems' and 'Dejection: an Ode' have begun to receive more attention, and the later poems too are beginning to be talked about. Where the Romantic reviewers differ most sharply from modern critics is in their complete failure to think of interpreting poems like 'The Ancient Mariner' allegorically. There is no evidence to suggest that Coleridge minded.

Coleridge's present eminence as a critic might also have surprised his contemporaries, but at the time they would no more have thought of a man's critical writing as being part of his creative work than we would think of a writer's scientific treatises as being relevant to our assessment of his novels. Until one began to think in terms of a history of criticism it would have been difficult to see Coleridge's place in it.

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His philosophical writings, and his theology and politics, were not received very sympathetically, and none of them has become a classic. Much of what he was trying to say had specific relevance to his own times, and it is easy to see that the reviewers who disapproved of what he was saying were in a far better position to have an opinion than anyone can be today. What they had at their fingertips takes years of study to acquire now. This is one of the reasons why we cannot afford to ignore the early reviews. They bring Coleridge into sharp focus against the contemporaries whom he resembled in so many respects, and by allowing us to distinguish between him and them they help us to define the sort of writer he really was.

NOTES

1. Henry Crabb Robinson, *On Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London 1938), i, 55.
2. *The European Magazine*, lxxvii (April 1815), 345–6.
3. For the background of this complaint, see Donald M. Foerster, 'Critical Approval of Epic Poetry in the Age of Wordsworth', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, lxx (1955), 682–705. Useful descriptions of the prevailing tastes and intellectual climate are to be found in John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: the Edinburgh Review 1802–1815* (London and Cambridge, Mass. 1957), Upali Amarasinghe, *Dryden and Pope in the Early Nineteenth Century: A Study of Changing Literary Taste, 1800–1830* (Cambridge 1962), and William S. Ward, 'Some Aspects of the Conservative Attitude Toward Poetry in English Criticism, 1798–1820', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, lx (1945), 386–98.
4. The lack of adequate censuses of foreign periodicals has obliged me to rely on the following sources for bibliographical information: Luise Sigmann, *Die englische Literatur von 1800–1850 im Urteil der zeitgenössischen deutschen Kritik* (Heidelberg 1918); Laurence Marsden Price, *English Literature in Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1953); Eric Partridge, *The French Romantics' Knowledge of English Literature (1820–1848)* (Paris 1924); *Literary History of the United States: Bibliography* (New York and London 1964), 35–9.
5. Number 147; quoted in Sigmann, 28.
6. Friederich Johann Jacobsen, *Briefe an eine deutsche Edelfrau über die neuesten englischen Dichter* (Altona 1820), 220–8.
7. O.L.B. Wolff, *Die schöne Litteratur in der neuesten Zeit* (Leipzig 1832), 337–44.
8. Amédée Pichot, *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse* (Paris 1825), 395–421.

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9. *The North American Review*, viii (March 1819), 320.

10. One on his poetry by R.C.Waterston in the *North American Review*, xxxix (October 1834), 437–58, the other a general account by G.B.Cheever in the *North American Review*, xl (April 1835), 299–351.

THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

1794

1. 'D.M.', *Analytical Review*

November 1794, 480–481

Although Robert Southey was co-author to the extent of contributing two of the three acts, Coleridge, who was looking after the details of publication in Cambridge, decided to let his own name stand alone on the title-page. For his explanation to Southey that two names would have seemed pretentious and that his own would sell more copies, see *CL*, i, 106.

Though, for reasons which we have of late had repeated occasions to specify, and which are indeed sufficiently obvious, we cannot approve of the practice of exhibiting recent political events in a dramatic form, we must do the author of this piece the justice to say, that he has been tolerably successful in his attempt to imitate the impassioned language of the french orators. Whether he have succeeded equally in his developement of the characters of the chief actors of this great political theatre, it may not, perhaps, at present be easy to determine. The plot of the piece being nothing more than a simple representation of a recent fact, needs not be decyphered. The concluding lines, spoken by Barrere, may serve as a specimen of the author's talent for dramatic declamation, [quotes ll. 192–213 (Southey's) (*PW*, ii, 516–17)]

2. From an unsigned review, *Critical Review*

November 1794, xii, 260–2

The fall of Robespierre was an event of the greatest importance to the affairs of France, and is a very proper subject for the tragic muse. It may, however, be thought by some to be too recent an event to admit of that contrivance which is essentially necessary in unravelling the plot of the drama. Indeed, we have been informed, that the work before us was the production of a few hours exercise, and must, therefore, not be supposed to smell very strongly of the lamp. Several parts too being necessarily made up of such reports of the French convention, as have already been collected through the medium of newspapers, may be expected to have little of the charms of novelty.

By these free remarks, we mean not to under-rate Mr. Coleridge's historic drama. It affords ample testimony, that the writer is a genuine votary of the Muse, and several parts of it will afford much pleasure to those who can relish the beauties of poetry. Indeed a writer who could produce so much beauty in so little time, must possess powers that are capable of raising him to a distinguished place among the English poets....

At the end of this work, Mr. Coleridge has subjoined, proposals for publishing by subscription, *Imitations from the modern Latin Poets*, with a critical and biographical *Essay on the Restoration of Literature*: a work in which we most heartily wish him success. The present is a very agreeable specimen of Mr. Coleridge's poetical talents, and as the writers, from whose works he proposes to frame imitations are but little known to English readers, though many of them possess much merit, he will render, we doubt not, an acceptable service to the public.

3. Unsigned notice, *British Critic*

May 1795, v, 539–40

Mr. Coleridge has aimed at giving a dramatic air to a detail of Conventional speeches, which they were scarcely capable of receiving. The sentiments, however, in many instances are naturally, though boldly conceived, and expressed in language, which gives us reason to think the Author might, after some probation, become no unsuccessful wooer of the tragic muse.

A MORAL AND POLITICAL LECTURE

1795

4. From an unsigned review, *Critical Review*

March 1795, xiii, 455

This little composition is the production of a young man who possesses a poetical imagination. It is spirited, and often brilliant; and the sentiments manly and generous. Though, with one or two exceptions, we admire the style of this little work, we think it rather defective in point of precision; and, instead of saying we have shown the necessity of forming some fixed and determinate principles of action, he should have said, we have represented certain characters. We also think our young political lecturer leaves his auditors abruptly, and that he has not stated, in a form sufficiently scientific and determinate, those principles to which, as he expresses it, he now proceeds as the most *important point*. We confess we were looking for something further, and little thought that we were actually come to the *Finis*. One or two more lectures might give a fulness to the whole, and be very useful. There is, however, much more than sixpenny-worth of good sense in this Lecture....

CONCIONES AD POPULUM

1795

5. Unsigned review, *Analytical Review*

January 1796, xiii, 90–1

These addresses were delivered to a popular assembly in the month of february last. They are eloquent harangues on interesting political topics: the first, on the general subject of liberty; the second, on the nature and consequences of the present war. The orator asserts the rights of free citizens with confidence; but it is not the confidence of an unprincipled demagogue, who, like Robespierre, ‘despotises in all the pomp of patriotism, and masquerades on the bloody stage of revolution, a Caligula with the cap of liberty on his head’. The ends which he pursues are reformation; but the instruments, which he wishes to employ, are only those of truth and reason. In order to render men susceptible of their rights, his plan is, to teach them their duties: and he would prepare them to maintain the one, and practise the other, by instilling into their minds the principles of religion. The philanthropic spirit, and the superiour talents of this writer, will be seen in the following description of that small but glorious band, whom he distinguishes by the title of ‘thinking and dispassionate patriots’.

These are the men who have encouraged the sympathetic passions till they have become irresistible habits, and made their duty a necessary part of their self interest, by the long continued cultivation of that moral taste which derives our most exquisite pleasures from the contemplation of possible perfection, and proportionate pain from the perception of existing *depravation*. Accustomed to regard all the affairs of man as a process, they never hurry and they never pause. Theirs is not that twilight of political knowledge which gives us just light enough to place one foot before the other; as they advance the scene still opens upon them, and they press right onward with a vast and various landscape of existence around them. Calmness and energy mark all their actions. Convinced that vice originates not in the man, but in the surrounding circumstances; not in the heart, but in the understanding; he is hopeless concerning no one—to

correct a vice or generate a virtuous conduct he pollutes not his hands with the scourge of coercion; but by endeavouring to alter the circumstances would remove, or by strengthening the intellect, disarms, the temptation. The unhappy children of vice and folly, whose tempers are adverse to their own happiness as well as to the happiness of others, will at times awaken a natural pang; but he looks forward with gladdened heart to that glorious period when justice shall have established the universal fraternity of love. These soul-ennobling views bestow the virtues which they anticipate. He whose mind is habitually imprest with them soars above the present state of humanity, and may be justly said to dwell in the presence of the Most High.

would the forms
Of servile custom cramp the patriot's power?
Would sordid policies, the barbarous growth
Of ignorance and rapine, bow him down
To tame pursuits, to indolence and fear?
Lo! he appeals to nature, to the winds
And rolling waves, the sun's unwearied course,
The elements and seasons—all declare
For what the Eternal Maker has ordain'd
The powers of man: we feel within ourselves
His energy divine: he tells the heart
He meant, he made us to behold and love
What he beholds and loves, the general orb
Of Life and Being—to be great like him,
Beneficent and active.

AKENSIDE

While we see much to admire in these addresses, we are sorry sometimes to remark a degree of vehemence in language, rather adapted to irritate than enlighten.

6. Unsigned notice, *Monthly Review*

January 1796, xix, 80–1

This is followed by a brief notice of *The Plot Discovered*, with the comment ‘Ditto repeated’.

This animated author tells us, in his preface, that these two discourses were delivered in February 1795, and were followed by six others, in defence of natural and revealed religion. They are replete with violent antiministerial declamation, but not vulgar. His fearless idea is, that ‘truth should be spoken at all times, but more especially at those times when to speak truth is dangerous’. The author dates from ‘Clevedon, Nov. 16, 1795’.

7. Unsigned review, *Critical Review*

February 1796, xvi, 216

Of the former of these we have had occasion to speak before, and we spoke in terms of approbation.

In the second address our orator gives an affecting and animated description of the crimes and distresses of the present war. We lay before our readers the closing paragraph—

Such in addition to the evils attending all wars, are the peculiar horrors of the present. Our national faith hath been impaired; our social confidence hath been weakened, or made unsafe; our liberties have suffered a perilous breach, and even now are being (still more perilously) undermined; the dearth, which would otherwise have been scarcely visible, hath enlarged its terrible features into the threatening face of Famine; and finally, of *us* will justice require a dreadful account of whatever guilt France has perpetrated, of whatever miseries France

has endured. Are we men? Freemen? rational men? And shall we carry on this wild and priestly war against reason, against freedom, against human nature? If there be one among you, who departs from me without feeling it his immediate duty to petition or remonstrate against the continuance of it, I envy that man neither his head nor his heart.

Mr. Coleridge possesses ingenuity and good sense. We would advise him to study correctness, and to guard against the swell in composition.

8. Unsigned review, *British Critic*

June 1796, vii, 682–3

The two following addresses, Mr. C. says, were delivered in the month of February 1795, and were followed by six others in defence of natural and revealed religion. Where, or to whom they were delivered, does not appear. These addresses are by the same author, whose address to the people on a supposed plot, we noticed last month. They contain similar sentiments and are expressed with similar consistency and similar elegance. His tender and compassionate anxiety for the welfare of mankind, he dwells upon through many pages, and with that spirit of patriotism, which has frequently actuated the writers of his party, attempts to ascribe the murders of Robespierre, and all the horrors acted in France, to the obstinate hostility of this country. When shall we cease to see this nonsense repeated, which the best informed even of our French enemies have again and again contradicted?

THE PLOT DISCOVERED

1795

9. Unsigned review, *Analytical Review*

January 1796, xiii, 92

This piece is written in the same free spirit, and in the same bold and animated language, with the preceding article [*Conciones ad Populum*]. The author comments upon the several clauses of the late bill; but his observations, now that the bills are passed into laws, it would be of little avail to repeat. *Actum est!*

10. Unsigned review, *British Critic*

May 1796, vii, 562

We abhor, not only as critics, but as men of morals, the custom which has of late prevailed among certain individuals, of taking a detached sentence from a speech or publication, and commenting upon it, without any consideration of the context. Mr. Coleridge, whom we have commended as a poet, has done this with respect to an expression of the Bishop of Rochester, which, when explained, was found not only to be harmless, but truly constitutional. The violence of this pamphlet supersedes all criticism; it breathes all the petulance and irritability of youth, assertion without proof, and the absurdest deductions from the most false and unreasonable premises,

THE WATCHMAN

1796

11. Letter, *Bristol Gazette*

24 March 1796

This pseudonymous letter, placed as a paid advertisement, was republished by Coleridge in a later number of the *Watchman* (2 April 1796, 157–8).

Messrs. Printers.

The *Watchman* having within these few weeks attracted the Notice of the Citizens of Bristol, through the Channel of your Paper I presume to make a few Comments on the Execution of that Work. In the first Number we observe the *Debut* of this Publication upon the political Theatre made with ‘professions of Meekness’. The Author’s bias being towards principles not men, will lead him to write in the ‘Spirit of Meekness’. The first effects of this Spirit, are, an abuse of every existing Review, implicating them with party and calumniating opinions—fully convinced of the little prejudice he possesses, he becomes Reviewer, declaring that he will execute the Trust ‘without Compliment or Resentment’. The first specimen of his Critical Abilities is exhibited on the brilliant Pamphlet of *Mr. Burke*—His ‘Spirit of Meekness’ is evident when he says ‘when men of low and creeping faculties wish to depreciate Works of Genius, it is their fashion to sneer at them as meer Declamation;—this mode has been practised by some low minded Sophisters with respect to the Work in Question’, and passing immediately from these characters to himself and his opinions of *Mr. Burke*, he becomes the herald of his own fame; and with his ‘ere I begin the task of blame’ adds to the many Trophies he already enjoys in his own ideas. In a few Numbers we shall it is probable, see his

‘Exegi monumentum aere perennius’ —announced.

In the Court and Hand-bill news, he wished to have displayed his wit; but, as he soars above vulgar prejudices the Humour is hid from the profane Eye.

*Odi profanum vulgus.*¹

His 'Spirit of Meekness' is visible in the Note under the Poem—had it been a Verse of the *Æneid* of *Virgil*, or the *Iliad* of *Homer*, less pomp could not have been used. I leave the Public to judge of the 'Meekness of Spirit', so evident in this. Inconsistency in the character of this Philosopher, seems a prominent feature. Thus...does he say 'how vile must that system be, which can reckon by anticipation among its certain enemies the Metaphysician, who employs the strength and subtlety of his Reason to investigate by what causes being acted upon, the human mind acts most worthily'. The *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* by *Mr. Godwin*, except by the prejudiced, will be allowed to be a deep Metaphysical Work though abstruse, yet to those who are earnest enquirers after Truth sufficiently clear in its deductions from every argument. It is a Work, which, if many of the ideas are not new has concentrated the whole mass of argument in a manner unequalled in the English Language—Therefore, do we class it among those productions who seek by their discussions to meliorate the condition of Man. In page 73, we find a chapter entitled 'Modern Patriotism' 'sententious and prejudiced';¹—in this *Mr. Godwin's Enquiry* is considered as vicious, and improper in its tendency. The Philosopher has mentioned the Arguments of *Mr. Goodwin* without giving the Reasons of or the Deductions drawn from them by that acute writer; should he find himself competent let him take up the Gauntlet and defend in a regular train of Argument supported by Reason, the system which he conceives to be injured by the Work. But the Difference would be too great—the one a cool Reasoner supporting his Doctrine with propriety, and waiting for the human mind to be more enlightened to prepare it for his theory, the other an Enthusiast supporting his Arguments by lofty Metaphors and high-toned Declamation.

Wishing that the *Watchman* in future, may be conducted with less prejudice and greater liberality,

I remain, yours &c.

Caius Gracchus

¹ 'Exegi monumentum...' 'I have raised a monument more enduring than brass' (Horace, *Odes*, iii, 30, 1). 'Odi...' 'I hate the uninitiated many' (Horace, *Odes*, iii, 1, 1).

POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS

1796

12. Unsigned notice, *British Critic*

May 1796, vii, 549–50

This collection is marked by tenderness of sentiment, and elegance of expression, neither however sufficiently chastened by experience of mankind, or habitude of writing. The following will be no unacceptable specimen of its merit.

[quotes ‘The Sigh’. (*PW*, i, 62–3)]

13. Unsigned review, *Analytical Review*

June 1796, xiii, 610–12

Coleridge’s account, in *Biographia Literaria*, of the reception of his first volume of poems, seems to refer particularly to this review (*BL*, i, 2).

From the proofs which Mr. C. has already given of considerable talents for eloquence, in his *Conciones ad Populum*, it was to be expected, that he would be qualified to exercise with success the kindred art of poetry: and the perusal of this small volume will justify the expectation.

Though several of the pieces are strongly expressive of an ardent love of liberty, the general character of the publication is by no means political. The poems, which are, for the most part, short, are written on a variety of subjects, and with very different degrees of merit: some of them appear to have been elaborated with great pains; others to have been the negligent productions of a momentary impulse. The numbers are not always harmonious; and the language, through a redundancy of metaphor, and the frequent use of compound epithets, sometimes becomes turgid: but every where the writer discovers a lively imagination, and a ready command of poetical language. The general character of the composition is rather that of splendour than of simplicity; and the reader is left more strongly impressed with an idea of the strength of the writer's genius, than of the correctness of his taste. As a pleasing example of Mr. C.'s inventive powers, we shall quote two or three stanzas from a piece which he entitles, 'Songs of the Pixies', who in the superstition of Devonshire are a race of invisible beings, harmless, and friendly to man.

[quotes ll. 47–88 (*PW*, i, 42–4)]

In a monody on the death of Chatterton, the disappointed hopes of that unfortunate youth are strongly represented in the following allegorical picture.

[quotes twelve lines which were omitted from the second edition (1797), but restored in *The Poetical Works* (1828) (see variant readings, *PW*, i, 128)]

To a collection of small pieces the author has chosen to give the name of Effusions: some of these are political, others descriptive, and others sentimental.

A very small number of these effusions are devoted to love: we are much pleased with the plaintive tenderness of the following.

[quotes 'The Sigh' (*PW*, i, 62–3)]

Poetical epistles form one division of this volume: but we do not think the author very successful in this class of poetry. The last piece is a pretty long poem, in blank verse, chiefly valuable for the importance of the sentiments which it contains, and the ardour with which they are expressed: it is entitled, 'Religious Musings'.

For two or three pieces in this volume, Mr. C. acknowledges his obligation to his friends.

14. Unsigned review, *Critical Review*

June 1796, xvii, 209–12

Of Mr. Coleridge we have already had occasion to speak as a poet. He certainly possesses a fine invention, and a lively imagination; and his poems glow with that ardor of passion, that enthusiastic love of liberty, which give energy to poetic composition, and force the reader into immediate admiration. They consist of sonnets, which, however, Mr. Coleridge chooses to call Effusions, a Monody on the Death of Chatterton, a few other copies of verses on various occasions, Epistles, and, what the author entitles 'Religious Musings'.

The Effusions are in general very beautiful. The following will please every lover of poetry, and we give them as a specimen of the rest:

[quotes 'Effusion 9, to Fayette' and 'Effusion 17, to Genevieve' (*PW*, i, 82 and 19–20)]

The following pretty copy of verses we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of transcribing:

[quotes 'Effusion 27' ('The Rose', *PW*, i, 45–6)]

Mr. Coleridge tells us that he was indebted for three of the Effusions to Mr. Charles Lamb, of the India House, —these are very beautiful. For the rough sketch of another pretty sonnet, Mr. Coleridge is indebted to Mr. Favel.¹ The first half of the fifteenth was written by Mr. Southey, the ingenious author of *Joan of Arc*. The production of a young lady, addressed to the author of a volume of poems published anonymously at Bristol, possesses great harmony and good sense.²

Notwithstanding the commendations to which these poems are entitled, they are accompanied with some blemishes. The Monody

¹ Favell, who had been at school with Coleridge, was one of the supporters of the plan to found a Pantisocracy in Pennsylvania.

² The 'young lady' was Coleridge's wife: she later declared that she had only contributed to writing 'The Silver Thimble' (*PW*, i, 104n).

addressed to Chatterton possesses many excellent passages: but that irregular species of versification in which it is written, is not, in our judgment, consistent with the laws of poetry. The production of the young lady, whose ear, however, seems admirably tuned to harmony, is objectionable on the same ground: this blemish we before noted in 'The Poetical Sketches' of the ingenious miss Cristall.¹

We must also observe that we frequently meet, in these poems, with expressions which, however pleasing in Spenser and Shakespeare, accord not with the present state of the English language. The versification is not always sufficiently polished, and, by not having the pause and accent in the proper place, grates upon a correct ear. The liberty too taken by Mr. Coleridge of coining words, and the impetuosity of a most powerful imagination, hurry him sometimes into what his readers will call bombast. For example:

yea, and there
Unshuddered, unaghasted, he shall view
Ev'n the Seven Spirits, who in the latter day
Will shower hot pestilence on the sons of men.

The superior excellence which characterises Mr. Coleridge's poems, compels us to wish that they possessed that uniform correctness of versification which frequently accompanies productions of far inferior merit; but Mr. Coleridge's blemishes are such as are incident to young men of luxuriant imaginations, which time and experience will, we doubt not, enable him to correct. His beauties are those of a very superior genius: —a richer line than the last of the three following we scarcely ever remember reading:

O! aged women, ye who weekly catch
The morsel tossed by law-forc'd charity,
And die so slowly, that none call it murder.

Mr. Coleridge makes the following judicious apology for what some readers may choose to call the querulous egotism that is wont to accompany the sonnet:

[quotes the first three paragraphs of the preface (*PW*, ii, 1135–36)]

¹ *The Poetical Sketches* of Ann Batten Cristall had appeared in 1795.

15. John Aikin, *Monthly Review*

June 1796, xx, 194–5

This unsigned review is attributed to John Aikin (1747–1822), physician and literary editor of the *Monthly Magazine* (Nangle, 104).

Two authorial footnotes have been omitted.

The promise of poetical talents, which this writer gave to the world in the lines inserted in the poem of his friend Mr. Southey, entitled *Joan of Arc*, is here brought to the proof by a small volume of his own composition; and we doubt not that he will be thought to have made good the expectations which he had raised by that specimen. It might thence be inferred, that the bent of his powers lay towards those loftier displays of the art which consist in boldness and novelty of conception, strength of figure, and sublimity of sentiment; and notwithstanding the admixture of subjects in this collection, apparently more calculated for the gentler graces of poetry, the leading character of his genius is still equally discernible. Not that we mean to represent him as unqualified for producing pictures of beauty and elegance, or for depicting the soft and tender emotions; of both which there are such striking examples in his works, that the sweet and the pathetic may be reckoned peculiarly congenial to his nature: but even in these the manner of an original thinker is predominant; and as he has not borrowed the ideas, so he has not fashioned himself to the polish and correctness of modern verse. Such a writer may occasionally fall under the censure of criticism: but he will always be, what so few proportionally are, an interesting object to the genuine lover of poetry. On this account we shall devote somewhat more space to the present publication, than its bulk alone would seem to demand.

The first piece is a ‘Monody on the Death of Chatterton’; a subject to which the author was naturally led from proximity of birth-place, and also, as we are sorry to find, from a melancholy resemblance in disappointed hope. It is in a wild irregular strain, suited to the theme, with some very moving and some very fanciful touches. We could with pleasure transcribe a few passages, but we rather leave it to entertain the

reader as a *whole*. It concludes with an allusion to a project of which we have already heard, as emanating from the fervid minds of this poet and two or three congenial friends, to realize a golden age in some imaginary ‘*undivided dale of freedom*’: but which, on sober reflection, we do not wonder to find him call

vain Phantasies! the fleeting brood
Of Woe self-solac’d in her dreamy mood!¹

The next piece of moderate length is entitled ‘Songs of the Pixies’; which are, it seems, in the rustic superstition of Devonshire, a kind of fairies, harmless or friendly to man. Ariel, Oberon, and the Sylphs, have contributed to form the pleasing imagery of which the two following stanzas will give a specimen:

[quotes from the poem]

Other short pieces, of which one of the most pleasing consists of ‘Lines to a beautiful Spring in a Village’, lead the way to a principal division of the volume, styled ‘Effusions’. These are short poems, many of them regular sonnets, others in a different form, but generally like them turning on a single thought, the topics of which are various; some breathing the high notes of freedom or fancy, some the softer strains of love and pity. A few of these, and of no inferior merit, are written by a friend, and distinguished by his signature. We shall copy, however, one of the author’s own:

[quotes ‘Effusion 26, on a Kiss’ (*PW*, i, 63–4)]

A few ‘poetical Epistles’ come next: but their merit is not, we think, appropriate to epistolary writing, for which our author’s style is little adapted. The most considerable of them, addressed to his ‘Sara’, is rather an ode, filled with picturesque imagery; of which the following stanzas compose a very striking sea-piece:

[quotes ll. 36–60 of ‘Lines written at Shurton Bars’ (*PW*, i, 98)]

The longest piece in the volume, entitled ‘Religious Musings, a desultory Poem written on Christmas Eve’, is reserved for the conclusion; and properly so, since its subject, and the manner of treating it, place it on the top of the scale of sublimity. It is, indeed, that in which we chiefly recognize the writer of the Maid’s Vision in *Joan of Arc*;

¹ A reference to the Pantisocracy.

possessing the same characteristic excellencies and defects. Often obscure, uncouth, and verging to extravagance, but generally striking and impressive to a supreme degree, it exhibits that ungoverned career of fancy and feeling which equally belongs to the poet and the enthusiast. The book of Revelations may be a dangerous fount of prophecy, but it is no mean Helicon of poetic inspiration. Who will deny genius to such conceptions as the following?

[quotes ll. 276–322 (*PW*, i, 119–21)]

Let not our readers suppose that we have beggared this volume by our extracts. The lover of poetry may be assured that much remains to repay his purchase; and we presume that he will not be less satisfied with his bargain, if, while it contributes to his own pleasure, it tends to disperse the clouds which have darkened the prospects of a man of distinguished worth as well as of uncommon abilities.

16. Unsigned notice, *Monthly Mirror*

June 1796, ii, 97

Mr. Coleridge is a poet of the first class, as not only the present volume, but also some fine philosophical verses in Mr. Southey's admirable poem of Joan of Arc amply testify. It is not to be disguised, however, that he is one of those young men, who, seduced into a blind and intemperate admiration of theoretic politics, forget the necessary discrimination between liberty and licentiousness. We mean not by this to meddle with political opinions; Mr. Coleridge may have better reasons for his compliment to Lord Stanhope than we are aware of.¹

¹ The volume was dedicated to Lord Stanhope (1753–1816), a radical peer who had been persecuted for his sympathies with the French Revolution.

ODE ON THE DEPARTING YEAR

1796

17. Alexander Hamilton, *Monthly Review*

March 1797, xxii, 342–3

This unsigned review is attributed to Hamilton (1762–1824), a Sanscrit scholar and until 1790 an officer in the army of the East India Company (Nangle, 104).

The higher species of ode is the *genuine* offspring of enthusiasm. The *imitated* enthusiasm of a cold and artificial imagination will never reach its tones of fancy and feeling; and all the mechanical tricks of abrupt transition, audacious metaphor, unusual phraseology, &c. produce nothing better than turgid obscurity and formal irregularity. It would be easy to produce examples, and from high authority too, of miserable waste of effort in attempts of this kind; which, indeed, are so commonly unsuccessful, that a reader of taste is very apt to turn over, in a miscellaneous collection, every piece which he sees marked with *strophe* and *antistrophe*.

The writer before us, however, will not be thought, by any one who is acquainted with his former compositions, defective in that first essential of sublime poetry, *ardent conception*; and the present effusion, faulty as it may be from extravagance in some parts, and from haste in others, will never be read without the emotions which true genius alone can call forth. For the hurry with which it was written, the author has, indeed, a better apology than is generally urged. The *departing year* would not stop for him; and when he first thought of addressing it, he could not stay to polish and revise his lines till the new year and new events had obliterated its traces. With respect to the strain of sentiment, we doubt not that Mr. C. has poured out the deliberate feelings of his soul, and would reject with scorn the excuse of precipitation. If general philanthropy has made him look with detestation on the schemes of

policy in which his country is unfortunately engaged, and the warmth of an ingenuous mind has dictated adequate expressions, he certainly would not acknowledge the apparent want of patriotism to be his fault; and he has taken care to assure us in sober prose, that, 'although he prophesies curses, he fervently prays for blessings'.

As a specimen of the poem, we shall copy the first two strophes; and we shall be deceived if they do not excite a desire in the real lovers of poetry to peruse the whole:

[quotes ll. 1–37 (*PW*, i, 160–1; the variant reading)]

Some striking lines to a young man of fortune, who had abandoned himself to indolent melancholy, close this short publication.¹

18. Unsigned notice, *Monthly Mirror*

April 1797, iii, 221

This ode, notwithstanding it is affected in some parts, and unintelligible in others, breathes the genuine spirit of poesy. The sentiments of Mr. Coleridge, with regard to public affairs, are already well known. He takes occasion to reprobate and lament the political events of the last year, and to augur very fatal consequences therefrom in the present. Such, however, as may disapprove of his sentiments, will receive considerable delight from his poetry, which is of the first order of merit.

¹ 'Addressed to a Young Man of Fortune' (*PW*, i, 157–8).

19. Unsigned review, *Critical Review*

July 1797, xx, 343–4

Mr. Coleridge, to whose former productions we have given impartial commendation, now attempts the flight of the Theban eagle, the great Pindar: but we are sorry to say that he too frequently mistakes bombast and obscurity, for sublimity. The poem certainly possesses some nervous lines; but in general we dare not applaud. We are displeased at finding such a number of affected phrases as a *bowed mind—skirts* of the departing year, which is rather a vulgar figure, notwithstanding the ‘*blanket*’ of Shakespeare may be brought forward to keep him in countenance.

Foeman—lidless—recenter—bedim—strangeyed destruction—marge—war-field—frost-winds—uncoffin’d—cum multis aliis, are affectations. The fault of our lyric poets is to support trifling ideas with a pomposity of thought, and shunning that simplicity which should for ever accompany the lyric Muse. Pegasus is a fiery steed; and when spurred, as he seems to have been on the present occasion, he is apt to fling his rider in the dirt: —*sat verbum*. The above strictures are by no means meant to discourage, but to *reform*. Poetical Enthusiasm should take Reason for her companion. We shall present our readers with an extract from the Ode, to prove that our animadversions are not dictated by the spirit of severity:

[quotes ll. 1–0 (*PW*, i, 160–1)]

POEMS

Second Edition 1797

20. Unsigned review, *Critical Review*

July 1798, xxiii, 266–8

As no author can justly be offended at liberal criticism, Mr. Coleridge ‘returns his acknowledgments to the different reviewers for the assistance which they have afforded him in detecting his poetic deficiencies’. Upon a revisal of his productions, he has omitted some with which he was less pleased, and has substituted new pieces for the discarded poems.

The dedication is one of the novelties of this edition. It is written in blank verse; and, while it does credit to the author, it also impresses a favourable idea of the brother to whom he offers the produce of his talents. The following passage is a part of it.

[quotes ll. 48–61 of ‘To the Rev. George Coleridge’ (*PW*, i, 175)]

The ‘Ode on the Departing Year’ (1796) was first published separately; and, when we reviewed it, we condemned the affectation and pomposity of the writer: but the piece, though it has since been altered, is still liable, in some degree, to the same imputations.

From the new sonnets we select that which is addressed to the river Otter, as it will gratify those who love to refer to the scenes of early enjoyment.

[quotes ‘Sonnet: To the River Otter’ (*PW*, i, 48)]

The ‘Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement’ evince a feeling heart. The comparison between the weeping eyes of a humane friend and the unmoved face of another equally benevolent, and the contrast between the latter and those who merely affect sympathy, are well drawn.

[quotes ll. 45–59 (*PW*, i, 107)]

In the invitation to Mr. Lloyd, many of the lines are stiff and affected; and a passage near the close of the piece may be misconstrued. When the poet says, 'she, whom I love, shall love thee', will not some readers be reminded of Cato's offer of his wife to his friend, even though such a thought could not enter into the head of the writer?

The lines 'On the Christening of a Friend's Child' are trifling; and some of the expressions and rhymes are ludicrous, though not intended to be so.

[the concluding remarks, devoted to the contributions of Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb, are omitted]

FEARS IN SOLITUDE

1798

21. 'D.M.S.,' *Analytical Review*

December 1798, xxviii, 590–2

We took occasion to remark the very unequal merit of Mr. Coleridge's poetry in a former volume, (vol. xxiii, p. 610). The specimen at present before us partakes of this general character: perhaps we must impute it to his *fears*, that Mr. C. is unusually sparing of imagery; it should, however, be added, that what imagery he has given us is unusually free from extravagance. Our author attributes the approach of those evil days, which, at the time this poem was written, seemed to threaten us with immediate and terrible confusion, to the strong and retributive justice of all-avenging Providence for our sins and wickedness.

[quotes ll. 41–63 of 'Fears in Solitude' (*PW*, i, 258)]

Mr. C., in common with many others of the purest patriotism, has been slandered with the appellation of an enemy to his country. The following passage, we presume, will be sufficient to wipe away the injurious stigma, and show that an adherence to the measures of administration is not the necessary consequence of an ardent love for the constitution.

[quotes ll. 129–53 of 'Fears in Solitude' (*PW*, i, 260–1)]

'France, an Ode'; and 'Frost at Midnight': in the former of these odes, the poet reconciles to the strictest consistency, his former attachment to french politics, with his present abhorrence of them. He yet remains the ardent worshipper of liberty; it is France—the apostate France, who impiously profanes her holy altars, and deluges them with blood. The few lines, written at a midnight hour in winter—the inmates of his cottage all at rest—do great honour to the poet's feelings, as the

husband of an affectionate wife, and as the father of a cradled infant. May he long enjoy the life and the felicity of them both!

22. C.L.Moody, *Monthly Review*

May 1799, xxix, 43–7

This unsigned review is attributed to Moody (1753–1815), a clergyman (Nangle, 104).

Had poetry always been guided by reason and consecrated to morality, it would have escaped the contemptuous reproach with which it has been loaded both by antient and modern philosophers. Had this divine art been appropriated with due effect to divine subjects, wisdom could not have withholden her admiration. It is matter of serious regret, therefore, that its professors seem to have been solicitous rather to please by the coruscations of a wild frenzy, than by a mild and steady ray, reflected from the lamp of truth. Poets have been called *maniacs*; and their writings frequently too well justify the application of this degrading epithet. Too long has the modern copied the antient poet, in decorating folly with the elegant attractions of verse. It is time to enthrone reason on the summit of Parnassus; and to make poetry the strengthener as well as the enlivener of the intellect; —the energetic instructor as well as the enchanting amuser of mankind.

Mr. Coleridge seems solicitous to consecrate his lyre to truth, virtue, and humanity. He makes no use of an exploded though elegant mythology, nor does he seek fame by singing of what is called Glory. War he reprobrates, and vice he deplores. Of his country he speaks with a patriotic enthusiasm, and he exhorts to virtue with a Christian's ardor. He tells, as he says,

Most bitter truth without bitterness;
and though, as we learn from his own confession, he has been deemed the enemy of his country, yet, if we may judge from these specimens, no one can be more desirous of promoting all that is important to its security and felicity.

He begins, in the first poem, 'Fears in Solitude', with describing his rural retreat, suited by its stillness and beauty to the contemplative state of his mind: but scarcely has he indulged himself with the view of the pleasures which it yields, than his heart is painfully affected by a recollection of the horrid changes which the march of armies, and the conflicts of war, would introduce on 'his silent hills'. His fears realize an invasion to his imagination; and were the horrors of war brought into our island, he owns that it would be no more than our crimes deserve:

[quotes ll. 41–129 of 'Fears in Solitude' (*PW*, i, 258–60)]

There is so much truth, with so much serious, pointed, and suitable exhortation, in these lines, that we feel it a duty, more for the sake of the public than of the author, to solicit their perusal. Mr. C.'s invocation to the Great Ruler of Empires to spare this guilty country, and his address to his countrymen to return to virtue and to unite in repelling an impious invading foe, are equally excellent. His description of the French is such as must animate Britons, were the enemy to attempt an invasion of us, to unite as one man in accomplishing what the poet requires:

[quotes ll. 140–53 of 'Fears in Solitude' (*PW*, i, 260–1)]

From bodings of misery to his country, he returns to the brighter prospects of hope. While, with the spirit of the Christian muse, he indulges,

Love and the thoughts that yearn for human kind

he expresses a peculiar attachment to his native soil;

There lives nor form nor feeling in my soul
Unborrow'd from my country! O divine And
beauteous island, thou hast been my sole And
most magnificent temple, in the which I walk
with awe, and sing my stately songs, Loving
the God that made me!

In the Ode entitled 'France', the author, like a true Arcadian shepherd, adores

The spirit of divinest liberty;
and he in course professes how much he wished, at the commencement of the revolution [*without bloodshed*] that France might break her

fetters and obtain freedom; —how he hung his head and wept at our interference; —and how, amid all the horrors and atrocities attending the revolution, he cherished the hope that these black clouds, which darkened the horizon of French liberty, would disperse, and that France would be happy in herself and just to surrounding states. These hopes he now considers as vain. He invokes Freedom ‘to forgive these idle dreams’, and particularly reprobates France for her conduct to Switzerland.

O France! that mockest heav’n, adult’rous,
blind, And patriot only in pernicious toils! Are
these thy boasts, champion of human kind: To
mix with kings in the low lust of sway, Yell in
the hunt, and share the murd’rous prey: T’
insult the shrine of liberty with spoils From
freemen torn; to tempt and to betray!

A beautiful address to Liberty constitutes the last stanza.

‘Frost at Midnight’ is a pleasing picture of virtue and content in a cottage. The author’s cradled babe seems to have inspired him, and here he dedicates his infant to solitude and religious contemplation.

Much as we admire the poetic spirit of this bard, we are forced to censure some of his lines as very prosaic. In his choice of words, also, he is not always sufficiently nice. The last line

As thou would’st fly for very eagerness,

is extremely flat, and gives the idea of an exhausted muse. Small poems, like those before us, should be highly finished. Neither coarseness nor negligence should be seen in cabinet pictures.

23. Unsigned review, *British Critic*

June 1799, xiii, 662–3

We by no means deny this writer the praise of sensibility and poetic taste, and, on this account, we the more seriously lament his absurd and preposterous prejudices against his country, and give a decided preference to the last of these compositions, as having no tincture of party. We would seriously ask Mr. Coleridge where it is that Englishmen have been so ‘tyrannous’ as to justify the exclamation,

From east to west
A groan of accusation pierces heaven,
The wretched plead against us, multitudes,
Countless and vehement, &c. &c.

Again he calls his countrymen,

A selfish, lewd, effeminated race,
Contemptuous of all honourable rule; Yet
bartering freedom, and the poor man’s life, For
gold, as at a market.

A little further on;

We have loved
To swell the war-whoop, passionate for war.

Now all this we deny, and consider it as the hasty emotion of a young man, who writes without experience and knowledge of facts. All these bitter things he has told, he says, without bitterness—credat Judæus. In his Ode to France, he tells his readers, somewhat inaccurately, that when France ‘said she would be free’,

*Bear witness for me, how I hoped and feared,
With what a joy my lofty gratulation, Unawed I
sung amid a slavish band.*

It is not apparent who is to bear witness for the poet, and we are sorry that one who sings so well should be obliged to *sing amid a slavish band*. We should like to know *where this slavish band* existed.

There are none of that description in this country. The Poem called 'Frost at Midnight', not being defaced by any of these absurdities, is entitled to much praise. A few affectations of phraseology, are atoned for by much expressive tenderness, and will be avoided by the author's more mature judgment.

24. Unsigned review, *Critical Review*

August 1799, xxvi, 472–5

A poem by Mr. Coleridge must attract the attention of all who are capable of understanding the beauties of poetry. The present publication has all the characteristic excellencies of his former ones. The opinions expressed are not indeed the same: without being a ministerialist, Mr. Coleridge has become an alarmist. He pictures the horrors of invasion, and joins the war-whoop against what he calls

an impious foe,
Impious and false, a light yet cruel race,
That laugh away all virtue, mingling mirth
With deeds of murder.

The ode entitled 'France' is in the same strain; and it has even been copied into a miscellaneous volume under the title, of 'The Recantation'.

But those who conceive that Mr. Coleridge has, in these poems, recanted his former principles, should consider the general tenor of them. The following passage surely is not written in conformity with the fashionable opinions of the day.

[quotes ll, 43–129 of 'Fears in Solitude' (*PW*, i, 258–61)]

The conclusion of the ode is very ridiculous.

Yes! while I stood and gaz'd, my temples bare,
And shot my being thro' earth, sea, and air,
Possessing all things with intensest love,
O Liberty, my spirit felt thee there!

What does Mr. Coleridge mean by liberty in this passage? or what connexion has it with the subject of civil freedom?

The concluding poem is very beautiful; but the lines respecting the film occupy too great a part of it. The first poem strikes us as the best; the passage we have quoted from it is admirable; and we could have given many of equal beauty.

LYRICAL BALLADS

1798

Published anonymously. Most of the poems in the collection were by Wordsworth; Coleridge's contributions to the first edition were 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'The Nightingale', 'The Dungeon', and 'The Foster-Mother's Tale'.

25. From an unsigned review, *Analytical Review*

December 1798, xxviii, 583–5

'It is the honourable characteristic of poetry', says the author of these ballads, in the advertisement which is prefixed to them, 'that its materials, are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind. The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of critics, but in those of poets themselves'.

'The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. It is desirable that such readers, for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but that, while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents; and if the answer be favorable to the author's wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision'.

There is something sensible in these remarks, and they certainly serve as a very pertinent introduction to the studied simplicity, which pervades many of the poems. The 'Rime of the ancye[n]t Marinere', a ballad in seven parts, is written professedly in imitation of the style as well as of the spirit of the ancient poets. We are not pleased with it; in our opinion it has more of the extravagance of a mad german poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writers.

Some of our young rhymesters and blank-verse-men, highly delighted with the delicacy of their own moral feelings, affect to look down on every thing human with an eye of pity. To them the face of nature is eternally shaded with a funereal gloom, and they are never happy but when their affections, to use the words of Sterne, are fixed upon some melancholy cypress. We are happy to conjecture, from some passages in these poems, that the author of them classes not with these sable songsters; in his ode to the nightingale he says,

[quotes ll. 7–23 of 'The Nightingale' (*PW*, i, 264–5)]

Among the poems which particularly pleased us from their character either of simplicity or tenderness, or both, are, that from which we have made the preceding extract, 'The Thorn', 'The Mad Mother', 'The Idiot Boy', and that with which we shall present our readers, the tale of 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill'....

26. Robert Southey, *Critical Review*

October 1798, xxiv, 197–204

This unsigned review has been attributed to Robert Southey (Jack Simmons, *Southey*, London 1945, 78). Southey (1774–1843) was Coleridge's brother-in-law, and was aware of the identities of the authors.

The review from which the following extracts are taken, begins by referring to the claim of the 'advertisement' to *Lyrical Ballads* that the majority of the poems in the collection are to be regarded as experiments, and goes on to heap scorn on Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy' and 'The Thorn'.

In a very different style of poetry, is the 'Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'; a ballad (says the advertisement) 'professedly written in imitation of the *style*, as well as of the spirit of the elder poets'. We are tolerably conversant with the early English poets; and can discover no resemblance whatever, except in antiquated spelling and a few obsolete words. This piece appears to us perfectly original in style as well as in story. Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible. Our readers may exercise their ingenuity in attempting to unriddle what follows.

[quotes ll. 309–30 (*PW*, i, 199)]

We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit.

With pleasure we turn to the serious pieces, the better part of the volume. 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' is in the best style of dramatic narrative. 'The Dungeon', and the 'Lines upon the Yew-tree Seat', are beautiful.

[praises 'The Tale of the Female Vagrant' and 'Lines Written near Tintern Abbey', but is displeased with 'most of the ballads']