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“Merely the Emptying out of my Desk”:
Coleridge about Wordsworth in the *Morning Post* of 1802

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ON 11 OCTOBER 1802, just a week after Wordsworth’s wedding, Coleridge published a mischievous epigram, entitled “Spots in the Sun,” in the *Morning Post*:

My father confessor is strict and holy,
Mi Fili, still he cries, *peccare noli*.
And yet, how oft I find the pious man
At Annette’s door, the lovely courtesan!
Her soul’s deformity the good man wins,
And not her charms! he comes to hear her sins!
Good father! I would fain not do thee wrong,
But ah! I fear, that they, who oft and long
Stand gazing at the sun, to count each spot,
Must sometimes find the sun itself too hot. (PW 310)

The substitution of “Annette” for “Thais” in Christian Wernike’s original version, as many critics, including Jim Mays in the *Poetical Works*, and Stephen Gill, Kenneth Johnston, Duncan Wu, John Worthen in their respective biographies have pointed out, cannot be ignored, particularly in the light of Wordsworth’s recent trip to France to settle matters with Annette Vallon and his subsequent marriage to Mary Hutchinson.¹ The hypocrisy of the self-righteous priest who visits the courtesan under the cover of pastoral care and the very idea of confession belong to the sphere of Catholicism, identified with the French. The explicit divulgence of Annette’s name can only be read as a violation of the discretion which Wordsworth would rightfully have expected from a friend who knew only too well the reason for Wordsworth’s trip to France prior to his marriage.² The ironic use of “strict and holy,” “pious” and “good” in these lines contrasts sharply with the references to the “pure of heart,” “the pure,” “virtuous Edmund,” “friend of my devoutest choice,” “lofty Poet, full of light and love” in “Dejection. An Ode” which Coleridge had published in the *Morning Post* on 4 October, Wordsworth’s wedding day. The publication of these two poems within the short span of a week are symptomatic of the complexity of Coleridge’s feelings at the time. While Coleridge’s primarily private Notebooks provide us with ample evidence of the

¹ Please note that the spelling is “Wernike” and not “Wernicke” as in PW; I have alerted Prof. Mays to this who has kindly acknowledged this correction. See http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/CPW_Vol1_16-09-06.htm#R84. See Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Kenneth R. Johnson, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York and London: Norton, 1998); Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons and the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). I delivered an earlier, shorter version of this essay at the 2006 Coleridge Summer Conference. I wish to thank Graham Davidson and John Thomson for vital suggestions and advice.

² See, for instance, Coleridge’s letter to Sara Hutchinson of 10 August 1802 (CL II 849) in which he refers to the potential fate of Caroline.

intricate, often contradictory nature of his thoughts and feelings, the almost compulsive exhibition of those feelings in the supposedly transparent, public medium of a popular newspaper like the *Morning Post* may strike us as more puzzling, perhaps even disturbing.

No one doubts the significance of the publication of “Dejection” in the *Morning Post* on Monday 4 October 1802, Wordsworth’s wedding day, for our understanding of the relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth.³ But “Dejection” is just one star, albeit a very bright one indeed, in a constellation of many publications which Coleridge produced for the *Morning Post* in the late Summer and Autumn of 1802. The brilliance of “Dejection” may have contributed to a certain neglect of Coleridge’s contemporary publications. In the same group we find political poems such as “France. An Ode,” a large extract from “Fears in Solitude,” sentimental and mock-sentimental poems including “The Keep-Sake” and “The Picture, or the Lover’s Resolution,” many satirical epigrams, articles on France and England’s response to France, a series on the Keswick Impostor and a mock-pastoral notice of Wordsworth’s marriage.⁴ Despite Coleridge’s own dismissal of the poetry in a letter to Thomas Wedgwood of 20 October 1802 as “merely the emptying out of my Desk” (CL II 876), many of those newspaper contributions are now part of the Coleridge canon. Coleridge is indeed “emptying out” his desk in the sense that many of the poems were not written specifically for the *Morning Post*. “Dejection” itself went through a process of textual transformation from a private verse letter to a public ode; “France” and “Fears in Solitude” had been published, together with “Frost at Midnight,” in 1798; various sentimental poems had been collected in Sara Hutchinson’s notebook. What I am particularly interested in is how the clustered public appearance of all these texts, poems and prose, reveals, not only the complexity of Coleridge’s obsession with Wordsworth at the time of the latter’s wedding in the autumn of 1802, but also Coleridge’s need to find a socially sanctioned public outlet for his feelings.

While many critics have drawn attention to separate aspects of Coleridge’s flurry of contributions to the *Morning Post*, the main biographical and poetical focus has been on the fraught significance of the publication of “Dejection” on

³ All biographies and major critical works about Coleridge and Wordsworth address the issue. For biographies see, for instance, in chronological order: Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography. The Early Years, 1770-1803* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Flamingo, 1990); Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York and London: Norton, 1998); Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2001); Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Adam Sisman, *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge* (London: HarperCollins, 2006). Major critical works about the interaction between the two poets include Paul Magnuson’s *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), Gene W. Ruoff’s *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics, 1802-1804* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989) and Lucy Newlyn’s *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 2001).

⁴ Most references to the texts will be directly from the relevant issues of the *Morning Post* (housed in the British Library, Newspaper section, at Colindale) but I will include corresponding references to poem numbers and line numbers from PW.

Wordsworth's wedding day. It is now a biographical commonplace to consider 4 October 1802 as a defining moment in the slowly disintegrating relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth, with "Dejection" epitomizing the demise of the mutual, invigorating creativity of the preceding years. Among those biographies John Worthen's *The Gang* offers an account of the interactions between Coleridge, the Hutchinsons and the Wordsworths in 1802; his account culminates in a confirmation of Wordsworth's domestic stability and Coleridge's emotional turmoil.⁵ Worthen's approach is based on Thomas McFarland's notion of the "Significant Group." McFarland explains Wordsworth's feeling for humanity as concentrated in the idea of a very specific group of people as opposed to mankind in general.⁶ McFarland's sympathetic reading of Wordsworth's need for, and largely successful handling of, well defined human relationships is contrasted with Coleridge's grander abstract visions for mankind at the cost of his more immediate relationships. Worthen notes in particular that "Coleridge's extraordinary series of publications (poems and prose) in the *Morning Post* between 6 September and 11 October 1802 in many ways showed him, too, marking out his sense of the new situation," but Worthen's discussion is largely restricted to a loosely Freudian reading of biographical details which may possibly be derived from the publications, and it does not offer much about the way Coleridge was putting together a very personal, yet at the same time very public, characterisation of Wordsworth (260). In *Reading Public Romanticism* Paul Magnuson has explored the advantages of reading Romantic poems in their original publication on the basis that "without precise location, there is no cultural significance," and in that spirit I wish to consider Coleridge's newspaper publications surrounding "Dejection."⁷ In this article I will explore the context of the interaction between Coleridge and Wordsworth by examining the significance of Coleridge's prolific contributions, other than "Dejection," to the *Morning Post* in September, October, and November 1802. What fascinates me most is not so much Coleridge's most pressing (and hence perhaps most critically scrutinized) personal emotional concern, his passion for Sara Hutchinson, but his preoccupation with Wordsworth at the time of his friend's marriage.

"Dejection. An Ode, written 4 April 1802" as published in the *Morning Post* of Monday 4 October 1802 is one of the first public constructions of Wordsworth as a monumental poet of national stature. While it does not name the poet explicitly, it includes specific references to "Peter Bell" and "Lucy Gray" thereby identifying Wordsworth to those who know him or who are

⁵ John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons and the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁶ "The Significant Group: Wordsworth's Fears in Solitude" is the third chapter of Thomas McFarland's *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). See pp. 147-148 in particular.

⁷ *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3. For some specific observations about "Dejection" in the *Morning Post*, see Heidi Thomson, "The Publication of Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' in the *Morning Post*" in *Script & Print: Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand* Vol 29, 2005, 298-310.

familiar with his work. The concluding lines warmly address Edmund as “O lofty Poet, full of light and love, / Brother and friend of my devoutest choice” (PW 2.2 894). A few months earlier, on 19 July 1802, Coleridge had written to William Sotheby about “a poem written during that dejection to Wordsworth” (CL II 814) in which he addresses Wordsworth as the “dearest Poet” (CL II 815) whose attention is drawn to the shape of the moon in the terms of his own poem as a “Boat becalm’d! thy own sweet Sky-canoe!” (CL II 816).

Yet despite the portrayal of closeness between Wordsworth and himself, Coleridge’s letter comes only six days after another letter to Sotheby in which he defines his poetical relationship with Wordsworth in terms of a fundamental discrepancy:

In my opinion, Poetry justifies, as *Poetry* independent of any other Passion, some new combinations of Language, & commands the omission of many others allowable in other compositions / Now Wordsworth, me saltem iudice, has in his system not sufficiently admitted the former, & in his practice has too frequently sinned against the latter. —Indeed, we have had lately some little controversy on this subject—& we begin to suspect, that there is somewhere or other, a *radical* Difference [in our] opinions—Dulce est inter amicos rarissimâ Dissensione condiri plurimas consensiones, saith St Augustine, who said more good things than any Saint or Sinner, that I ever read in Latin. (CL II 812).

The “*radical* Difference” is smoothed over with a reference to St Augustine who values the sweetness of occasional difference of opinion in close friendships, and we should also keep in mind that Coleridge would not want to alienate Sotheby who was after all Wordsworth’s friend as well. But the relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth was more strained than Coleridge lets on in this letter, and the range of Coleridge’s publications in the *Morning Post* of late 1802 provides us with a striking snapshot of Coleridge’s mixed thoughts and feelings about Wordsworth as a poet and human being. Not only did the *Morning Post* provide Coleridge with a public, socially sanctioned outlet for his jealousy about Wordsworth’s relationships with women, for his need to present Wordsworth as a monumental and virtuous poet, and for his urge to satirize Wordsworth’s moral being, it also made it possible for him to assert his own poetic identity despite various statements at this time about giving up being a poet. The newspaper format confirms Coleridge’s impulse to go public with his thoughts and feelings, and these publications could be said to address a double audience: the ordinary newspaper reader, and the Wordsworth circle who would have understood the references to their own situation.

As the address in “Dejection” to “Edmund” indicates, Coleridge wants Wordsworth to be not only a lofty poet, he wants him to be virtuous as well; poetic eminence and moral virtue are firmly associated. So in the newspaper

version of “Dejection,” the personal friend “dearest Edmund” is also described as “virtuous Edmund” (PW 2.2 890) before being addressed as “lofty Poet” (PW 2.2 894). The epithet “virtuous” introduces a moral quality to the construction of Wordsworth’s poetic identity, a quality which is not without political significance when we consider the hostility between England and France at the time. This proclamation of Edmund as virtuous and lofty comes at the conclusion of a period during which Wordsworth had to make some crucial moral decisions about his future. In order to marry Mary Hutchinson he had to resolve the unfinished business with his former lover Annette Vallon and their child Caroline. Wordsworth’s marriage then serves not only as a reminder for Coleridge’s own unhappy domestic situation, it also confirms Wordsworth’s final unavailability as husband for Annette. Coleridge’s sense of entrapment in his own marriage, his belief in the sacredness of marriage, his frustrated desire for Sara Hutchinson probably all fed into his awareness of Wordsworth’s fortunate severance from a former allegiance which allowed him to settle down happily with a consciously chosen partner of more mature years. The fact that Wordsworth, to his credit, managed to do this without permanently alienating any of the parties would not have lessened, I think, Annette’s sorrow at the final extinction of her hopes for marriage. Many of Coleridge’s contributions to the *Morning Post* of that period serve as reminders to the Wordsworths, not only of Coleridge’s own sense of abandonment, but also of the exclusion of Annette and Caroline from their lives. Annette’s French nationality, particularly at this moment in history, was a complicating factor in an already emotionally complex situation. The vulnerability which Wordsworth must have felt regarding these private matters can be extended then to feelings of anxiety about the burgeoning hostility between England and France during the precarious Peace of Amiens.

Wordsworth’s return from France in September 1802 coincided with a shift in the *Morning Post*, largely carried by Coleridge’s journalism, away from qualified support of Bonaparte to a jingoistic stance in which anti-French sentiment mingles with predictions of the fall of Bonaparte (as in the comparative essays between France and Rome of 21, 25, 29 September and 2 October) and partisan clamouring for the return of the Bourbons (as in the 12 October issue).⁸ Coleridge’s portrayal of France and the French in the *Morning Post* oscillates between partisan support of the royalist cause against Napoleon and vilification of anything French. Some of the writings display for the first time Coleridge’s outspoken patriotism in which the critique of the autocratic Napoleon lapses into the xenophobic condemnation of the country to the extent that any cultural association could be constructed as sedition: “We must be jealous of the progress of their truly slavish language among us; we must be detectors and detesters of their mock philosophy, of their false and boastful pretensions in science and literature, equally as in politics” (EOT I 324).

⁸ According to Erdman, Coleridge was claiming by 1814 that he had been the leading voice of dissent with France during the “treacherous Peace of Amiens” (EOT I 323).

Association with France is equated with enmity towards one's own country, a point which Coleridge develops in the two letters to Mr. Fox (4 and 9 November 1802) which pointedly question Charles Fox's trip to France at a time when this, he suggests, can only be seen as an endorsement of the new regime: "You went to France.—Your ostensible, and, I believe, true motive, was honourable, and at any less inauspicious time would have been adequate" (EOT I 387). In the second letter Coleridge elaborates on Fox's journey and while he admits that the examination of manuscripts with a view to publication is a good enough reason, he reprimands Fox for socializing with the enemy: "But what has the examination of MS. to do with the Levees of Bonaparte, or the dinners of Talleyrand?" (EOT I 392). He emphasizes the "domestic depravity" (EOT I 392) in France and Talleyrand's deficient "purity of his domestic morals" (EOT I 393) before reminding Fox that appearances matter greatly, particularly so for men of public stature:

To a certain extent even our inward feelings have less of *reality* than our appearances: for they belong less to the external world, and act less upon our fellow creatures. If this be the case with all men, much more then with you. You have lost the right, Sir! to act as a common individual. It is, perhaps, one of the defects of your character, that in your habitual feelings you are not sufficiently aware of your own importance, and of the duties which it imposes upon you.

(EOT I 398)

I cannot help but feel the relevance of this passage to Coleridge's high-minded construction in "Dejection" of a Wordsworth superior in poetical and moral terms to ordinary mortals. The public visibility of the politician also applies to the poet who represents the nation. Like Fox, Wordsworth had gone to France. Unlike Fox, he did not have the excuse of researching a book. These were dangerous times to sort out one's previous relationship with a French woman which had produced a child out of wedlock. Consorting with the enemy, and the suggestion of a sexual relationship with the enemy in particular, were (and still are) considered major betrayals of one's own country and its patriotically acclaimed, superior domestic virtues. So, in criticizing Fox, Coleridge is also criticizing Wordsworth.

A week after Wordsworth's wedding, on 11 October, an editorial puff announced the imminent republication of "France. An Ode" which was "peculiarly calculated to interest Englishmen at the present moment." Both "France" and a large extract from "Fears in Solitude" which were both published on 14 October may be read as a reminder of Wordsworth's fraught alliance with and escape from the clutches of France. The "Argument" to "France", very much like Books 9 and 10 of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, centres on the Poet whose hopes for political Liberty in France are crushed, who realizes that Liberty flies from "priestcraft's harpy minions" (PW 174 95) and can only belong "to the individual man, so far as he is pure, and inflamed with the love

and adoration of God in Nature” (PW 1.1 464). Similarly the passage from “Fears” again emphasizes the wholesomeness of British domesticity and the need to repel “an impious foe, / Impious and false, a light yet cruel race, / That laugh away all virtue, mingling mirth / With deeds of murder” (PW 175 140-143). The wholesale dismissal of the French as “impious and false,” who laugh as they kill, would have made awkward reading for someone who had recently permanently parted from his French child and her mother. “Fears in Solitude” addresses Britain as the “Mother Isle” (PW 175 177) whose mountains and lakes are credited with formative powers. Jim Mays astutely remarks that the “language better evokes WW’s experience of the Lake District and of the North than of C’s Devon and Somerset” (PW 1.1 475). Indeed, these lines may very well be more applicable to Wordsworth who has now fully abandoned France and who has returned, politically and emotionally to the motherland.

The juxtaposition of British domesticity and impious, priest-led, French wantonness is expounded upon more savagely in a series of “Original Epigrams,” loose, usually unacknowledged translations from Christian Wernike’s *Überschriften. Nebst Opitzens, Tschernings, Andreas Gryphius und Adam Olearus. Epigrammatischen Gedichten* (Leipzig, bey Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1780), prefaced by Karl Wilhelm Ramler, which were published in the *Morning Post* on 23 September, 2 October, and 11 October 1802. At one level these epigrams were obviously intended as mere trifles, but the satiric relevance for Wordsworth’s situation invites closer scrutiny, particularly since the more disturbing ones make a political statement about sexual encounters. “From An Old German Poet (After Wernike)” of 11 October 1802 satirizes the “vigorous German” (PW 317 8) who, cuckolding French husbands by impregnating their wives, thereby becoming “the Father of his Country’s foes, / And turns their Warriors oft to Parricides” (PW 317 10-11). Germans who produce children with the French thereby becomes father of national enemies who may very well become the killers of their own parent. The potential allusion, if we substitute “English” for “German,” to Wordsworth producing a child with a French woman, who by its very nationality is an enemy of England (even though, as a girl, Caroline would not have been destined for combat), comes at a time of frenetic anti-French feeling. Exposure of an affair and a child with a French woman would most certainly have damaged Wordsworth’s public status. At the very least it would have seriously tainted any claim to patriotic virtue and it could potentially even be read as sedition. The same series of epigrams contains the even more mischievous “Spots in the Sun” to which I referred in my opening paragraph. As part of the patriotic propaganda against France the same *Morning Post* issue also announces the imminent republication of “France. An Ode” about “the atrocious conduct of France in subjugating and pillaging Switzerland.” The inclusion of the savage epigrams alongside the odes and longer lyrics suggests that the military abuses of France are increasingly associated with supposedly ethnically specific traits of lust, cruelty,

and deception in the French.

Close to “Spots in the Sun,” in the adjacent column in fact, we may see the first part of Coleridge’s series on the bigamist Keswick impostor, ironically entitled “Romantic Marriage”(EOT I 357-358). In this first article about local lust and deception Coleridge refers to the wedding on 2 October, just two days before Wordsworth’s wedding, of Alexander Augustus Hope to Mary Robinson, the Beauty of Buttermere who, like Mary Hutchinson, “is now about thirty” (EOT I 357). The article reveals how only two months before, a certain Charles Hope had settled in Buttermere and had already paid “his addresses to a lady of youth, beauty, and good fortune” whom he subsequently jilted in favour of Mary Robinson (EOT I 358). His apparent lack of interest in the bride’s assets partly alleviated suspicions about wilful deceit, but the article continues all the same that:

the interest which the good people of Keswick take in the welfare of the beauty of Buttermere, has not yet suffered them to entirely subside, and they await with anxiety the moment when they shall receive decisive proofs that the bridegroom is the real person whom he describes himself to be. The circumstances of his marriage are sufficient to satisfy us that he is no impostor; and, therefore, we may venture to congratulate the beauty of Buttermere upon her good fortune. (EOT I 358)

Despite the polite congratulatory disclaimer at the end of the article the seeds of suspicion about Hope’s fake identity, and his potential bigamy, have been sown. The pristine Lake District setting of this drama, far removed from the metropolis in which the *Morning Post* is published and even further removed from France, augments the relevance for the Wordsworth circle. Sublime local settings also harbour deception and betrayal, and as with the epigram on the pious priest, appearances can be deceiving. Wordsworth, in 1792, may very well have considered marriage with Annette, particularly given her pregnancy, but ten years later he married Mary Hutchinson. Who knows, there may even have been some initial nervousness at the back of Mary’s mind that Wordsworth could even have entered some form of marriage with Annette during a period of very confusing legislation regarding marriage in France, and that she herself, as a result, may have married a bigamist. All of these suggestions are conjectural, but there is something about the combined timing of all these contributions and even the spatial positioning on the page which evoke some of the spectres of anxiety and jealousy that are haunting Coleridge’s mind. The second instalment of “Romantic Marriage” published on 22 October emphasizes the factual basis of the piece and the regrettable, because beautiful, setting: “The following are the particulars of the novel of real life, the scene of which has unfortunately been laid among our Mountains” (EOT I 374).

In the final episode, by now entitled “The Fraudulent Marriage” and

published on 5 November 1802, the “pretended Colonel Hope” has left behind a dressing box with a double bottom in which Mary of Buttermere found “a number of letters addressed to him *from his wife and children*, under the name of Headfield” (EOT 390). The impostor’s use of a range of names is closely associated with the deception: “Some of your correspondents will inform us, perhaps, whether a marriage under a false name, be a legitimate marriage” (EOT 390). We know that Annette did use the name “Madame Williams” or “la Veuve Williams” and that Caroline, who was after all recognized by Wordsworth as his child, had been given his surname.⁹ Annette’s claim for the more respectable appellation of “Madame” or “Veuve” is, legally speaking, false, but the resulting appearance of propriety would have made her status in daily life a bit less awkward. Caroline and her mother probably referred to Wordsworth throughout their lives as “father” because the good-natured Henry Crabb Robinson, in a rare moment of peevishness which may highlight the awkwardness of actually hearing the family bond pronounced so openly, condemns Caroline’s spontaneous use of the word as an indiscretion during the 1820 visit: “Oct. 3rd . . . I repaired to Rue Charlot and was introduced to Mrs. Baudouin, a mild, amiable little woman in appearance. I liked everything about her except that she called Wordsworth ‘father,’ which I thought indelicate.”¹⁰ So even if Wordsworth had not married Annette, for practical purposes there was a clear reminder of his French family in the use of his name by his former lover and their child. Coleridge’s article concludes indignantly: “It is greatly to be hoped that the wretch will be apprehended—a more detestable action was surely never perpetrated. Poor Mary is the object of universal concern” (EOT I 391). All in all we have a story of unfaithfulness set in the Lake District in which the betrayal of Mary of Buttermere may bring to mind the abandonment, no matter how amicably handled, of Annette Vallon and Caroline in favour of Mary Hutchinson. Coleridge may also be highlighting the contrast between Wordsworth’s openness and Headfield’s deceit, but even in this more favourable reading one can imagine that the Wordsworths would not have appreciated the potential allusion to their private lives. The references to jilting and illegal marriages would also have been disconcerting reading at that very moment for Mary Hutchinson who, like Mary Robinson, had married at a similar age a man who had had a previous relationship which produced a child and who almost certainly had entertained the possibility of marriage with his French lover.¹¹

The sublime Lake District setting of this drama, of which Coleridge makes so much because of the contrast between the purity of the setting and the

⁹ Annette’s death certificate, however, lists her as “spinster.” See Émile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* (London: Dent, 1922), 26-31, and also George McLean Harper, *Wordsworth’s French Daughter: The Story of her Birth, with the Certificates of her Baptism and Marriage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921).

¹⁰ *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Dent, 1938), vol. 1, 248.

¹¹ As an aside, it is worth noting that when Wordsworth portrayed the fate of Mary of Buttermere in Book 7 of the *Prelude* (1805), he consigns her to a quiet life in her native place and her new-born infant, the product of a bigamous union, to the grave (ll. 351-360) in *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 244.

sordidness of the events, had already been planted in the newspaper readers' minds on 9 October 1802, a mere two days before the publication of the first instalment about the Keswick impostor. At the bottom of the social news and satire column we find a mock-picturesque announcement of the Wordsworths' marriage and subsequent removal to Grasmere:

Monday last, W. Wordsworth, Esq. was married to Miss Hutchinson of Wykeham, near Scarborough, and proceeded immediately, with his wife and his sister, for his charming cottage in the little Paradise vale of Grasmere. His neighbour, Mr. Coleridge, resides in the vale of Keswick, 13 miles from Grasmere. His house (situated on a low hill at the foot of Skiddaw, with the Derwent Lake in front, and the romantic River Greta winding round the hill) commands, perhaps, the most various and interesting prospects of any house in the island. It is a perfect *panorama* of that wonderful vale, with its two lakes, and its complete circle, or rather ellipse, of mountains. (EOT III 73)

While the provenance of this announcement is not entirely clear, I strongly suspect Coleridge's direct involvement in the publication of this announcement, partly because of the ironic timing and placing.¹² The huge number of topographical references in Coleridge's writings at the time, and the subsequent series on the Keswick impostor, suggest Coleridge's direct involvement in the publication of this announcement. In addition to the letter to G. B. Greenough of 13 April 1801 which Erdman refers to as an almost verbatim repetition -- "My House commands perhaps the noblest Prospects of any House in the island / & my honored Friend, Wordsworth, has fixed his Cottage in the most *beautiful* Spot in Grasmere Vale" (CL II 718)—there are so many other references which are worth considering for a reading of this rather strange wedding announcement which is as much, if not more, about Coleridge as it is about the Wordsworths.

Like so many of Coleridge's contemporary newspaper contributions it is both funny and serious. More specifically, it associates place, and the distinction between the two poets' chosen sites, with the "radical difference" between their poetics as alluded to in the letters to Southey and Sotheby of July 1802. Coleridge's own enchantment with the views from Greta Hall and its attendant poetic associations pervades his letters between 1800 and 1802. The distinction between his own house with the commanding views and Wordsworth's charming cottage suggests a split between the sublime and the beautiful. Both in the newspaper announcement and in the earlier letter Wordsworth's cottage and its setting is associated with the more tranquil "beautiful" while his own house and its location has "sublime" connotations

¹² See EOT III 73 for an account of possibilities. Erdman refers to Mary Moorman's *Life* I, 575 and R.S. Woof in *Studies in Bibliography* 15(1962), 183-4. Erdman states that De Quincey thought of this as an "unseasonable jest" by Coleridge or Lamb. Dorothy Wordsworth was definitely not amused by it and assumed that it was Daniel Stuart being "ridiculous."

because of its higher, loftier location, commanding superior prospects over the vale. This position quite literally puts Coleridge on top, presiding and commanding over the Wordsworths' abode by being in a more prestigious, more noble position. The contrast between the beautiful and the sublime, and its attendant poetical connotations of cushioned tranquillity and visionary grandeur respectively, is definitely on Coleridge's mind when he implies Wordsworth's preference for the mundane in the "radical difference" between Wordsworth and himself. Coleridge's fear is that Wordsworth is perhaps too grounded in the peaceful beauty of Grasmere and that he has become too domesticated for his own poetic good.

While this is not the place to fully explore Coleridge's passionate observations about his delight in Greta Hall and its surroundings, his enchantment with Greta Hall is closely connected with his own identity. Already in May 1800 he writes to Godwin that it is a "house of such prospect, that if, according to you & Hume, impressions & ideas *constitute* our Being, I shall have a tendency to become a God—so sublime & beautiful will be the series of my visual existence" (CL I 588). The house and its setting is associated with superior writing: "Of Keswick & [of] my house, heaven forbid that I shall begin to write at the fag end of such a beggarly sheet of paper as this--. No! as soon as the Stir & Hurry is over I shall open upon you in a sheet that might serve for a sheet" (CL I 608). And on the very day that he moves in, writing to Josiah Wedgwood on 24 July 1800, he anticipates Wordsworth's joining him in Keswick: "Wordsworth lives 12 miles distant—in about a year's time he will probably settle at Keswick likewise" (CL I 610). The next day he writes to James Webbe Tobin from the roof, again associating his presence in the house with a mock poetic identity: "From the leads on the housetop of Greta Hall, Keswick, Cumberland, at the present time in the occupancy and usufruct-possession of S. T. Coleridge, Esq., Gentleman-poet and Philosopher in a mist" (CL I 612). In the same letter he anticipates Wordsworth's move to Keswick as well, but at the same time he voices the fear that Wordsworth may be too ensconced in his nest in Grasmere: "Wordsworth remains at Grasmere till next summer (perhaps longer). His cottage is indeed in every respect so delightful a residence, the walks so dry after the longest rains, the heath and silky kind of fern so luxurious a bedding on every hilltop, and the whole vicinity so tossed about on those little hills at the feet of the majestic mountains, that he moves in an eddy; he cannot get out of it" (CL I 613). And Wordsworth obviously decided in the end that he did not want to get out of it. The wedding announcement of 9 October 1802 also echoes a much earlier notice in the *Morning Post* of 5 September 1800 about Coleridge's move to Cumberland: "Coleridge, the Poet, has fixed his domestic residence among the lakes of Cumberland, where romantic scenery will continue to render his Muse at once harmonious and prolific" (EOT III 316). The wedding announcement two years later, with its emphasis on the distinction of both poets' homes, affirms the separation between the two friends despite Coleridge's various

attempts to lure his friend and his family to Greta Hall.

Concurrent with the wished for close personal alliance with the Wordsworths in the context of Wordsworth's new family situation, the intense correspondence with Sara Hutchinson in the absence of the Wordsworths during their trip to France, and the emphasis on setting and locale as a unifying factor in existence, is the attempt by Coleridge, in the summer of 1802, to disentangle his own poetic identity from Wordsworth's. The July letters to Sotheby and Southey which mention the "radical difference" also mention the loss of his own "poetic Genius" (CL II 831) in favour of a more defined critical role: "acting the arbitrator between the old School & the New School [I] hope to lay down some plain, & perspicuous, tho' not superficial, Canons of Criticism respecting Poetry" (CL II 830). But despite this professed new direction, Coleridge takes great pains at this stage to define his poetics through his own identity as a poet. At the end of August he announces to Sotheby his plan of sending "verses, &c to the *Morning Post*, under the signature 'Εστησε" (CL II 856) with a typical disclaimer: "I need not say, that the greater number of the verses signed ' Εστησε will be such as were never meant for any thing else but the peritura charta of the *M. Post*" (CL II 857). That he did consider some of his verses to be less ephemeral, however, is obvious from what he wrote barely two weeks later to Sotheby. While presenting an argument on the necessity for "Passion" as opposed to mere "sensibility" and on the need for poetry to transcend a record of the mundane, a distinction which relates to the radical difference between his poetics and Wordsworth's, Coleridge holds up his own "Chamouny" as an example for the need of a Swiss sublime setting for his commanding ideas: "I transferred myself thither, in Spirit, & adapted my former feelings to these grander external objects. You will soon see it in the *Morning Post* -- & I should be glad to know whether & how far it pleased you" (CL II 865). In the same letter Coleridge also clarifies his own Miltonic, political mission in the use of ' Εστησε, a preferred pseudonym for his *Morning Post* contributions at this time: "' Εστησε signifies—*He hath stood*—which in these times from apostacy from the principles of Freedom, or of Religion in this country, & from both by the same persons in France, is no unmeaning Signature, if subscribed with humility, & in the remembrance of, Let him that stands take heed lest he fall" (CL II 867). So despite the standard disclaimer about the transitory, ephemeral nature of newspaper publishing, Coleridge does picture a sublime and political vision for his own poetry, and on top of that, the fairly consistent use of the pen name ' Εστησε throughout that period signifies a coherence among his contributions, an invitation to the reader to relate these poems to each other as the work of someone, who despite the range of genres and subject matter, can be identified with one individual person who stands for this body of work.

As if to make his point about the importance of a sublime vision more substantial, Coleridge had published, on 11 September 1802, "Chamouni; The Hour Before Sun-Rise. A Hymn" (PW 301) which he would always doggedly

defend as one of his major creations against Wordsworth's rejection of it as an instance of the mock sublime. Jim Mays points out in his headnote to the poem that Coleridge "continued to place a high value on it in spite of criticism made by WW It was connected in his mind with a sense of exhilaration and a new beginning following the dejection of the previous months, and he positioned it first in the section 'Meditative Poems in Blank Verse' in *SL* and after. Its frequent reprinting, especially in America, indicates, that it was one of the most popular of his poems during his lifetime" (PW 1.2 719). In the larger context of "Dejection" this poem is Coleridge's public assertion that he too could produce poetry of the sublime (albeit with some unacknowledged borrowing from Friederike Brun's "Chamonix beym Sonnenaufgange"). As late as 1819 Coleridge expressed annoyance that Wordsworth "condemned the Hymn in toto (which nevertheless I ventured to publish in my "Sibylline Leaves") as a specimen of the Mock Sublime" (CL IV 974). The sublime, distinctly un-picturesque, experience of the August ascent of Scafell, the voluble letters to Sara Hutchinson full of references to the experience of the natural landscape and its reverberations for the mind and soul, the sense of personal liberation in the absence of the Wordsworths and the knowledge that Wordsworth was sorting out some rather down to earth matters all made Coleridge soar in this poem. While Reeve Parker reads the poem as a blessing and "epithalamic gesture" towards Wordsworth, I see more of an assertion of independence on Coleridge's part.¹³ Furthermore, in an affirmation of a traditional theological order in which "[e]arth with her thousand voices calls on God!" (PW 2.2 930), the mountain is also associated with a "kingly spirit" (PW 2.2 930) in the Savoy Alps, a royalist reference at a time when Napoleon's increasingly expansionist imperialism would soon become the subject of Coleridge's political articles in the *Morning Post* (21, 25, 29 September and 2 October 1802). Wordsworth's reported rejection of the poem as mock sublime may have something to do with his annoyance with Coleridge's all too easy claim to have stood ["ΕΣΤΗΣΕ"] "in adoration" while he had never been anywhere near Chamouni.¹⁴ Wordsworth's implied preference for lived experience as the only valid basis for poetry as against Coleridge's claim for the successful translation of an imagined experience into poetry suggests a similar contrast to the one underlying the wedding announcement in which Wordsworth insists on dwelling in the homely vale of Grasmere while Coleridge is transported among the panoramic views from Greta Hall.

The final group of *Morning Post* poems I wish to dwell on can all be loosely categorised as "sentimental" or "mock-sentimental" and, perhaps for that very reason, they have been convincingly associated with Coleridge's passion for

¹³ *Coleridge's Meditative Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 160. For a detailed reading see Keith G. Thomas, "Coleridge, Wordsworth and the New Historicism: 'Chamouny; The Hour before Sun-Rise. A Hymn' and Book 6 of *The Prelude*", *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994), 81-117.

¹⁴ Wordsworth: "Coleridge never was at Chamouni, or near it, in his life" in *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols 1876 (New York: AMS, 1967) vol. 3, 442.

Sara Hutchinson.¹⁵ “The Picture; or, The Lover’s Resolution. A Poem” (PW 300) was published under the Ἑστῆσε pseudonym on 6 September, just days after William and Dorothy had arrived back in London from their painful mission of severing, once and for all, all potential marital ties with Annette Vallon.¹⁶ The lover’s hyperbolically expressed resolution, with its dramatic rejection of lovesick folly and lovelorn sensibility in favour of new found freedom and independence, is exploded by the discovery (“But what is this?”) of a picture made by the beloved Isabel. The determined ex-lover cannot possibly keep this picture, the conclusion cheekily tells us, because its association would re-ignite his supposedly conquered passion. Nothing remains to be done but to hasten after Isabel and return it. With the same astute self awareness which characterizes “Dejection,” Coleridge conveys the paralysing grip of a weakness while asserting the need for the very resolution and independence which Wordsworth had celebrated in the eponymous poem of July 1802. While the poem both gently satirizes and portrays Coleridge’s passion for Sara and the impossibility of breaking with her, it also raises the more general question as to whether it is ever possible to put a passionate attachment fully behind oneself, which was exactly what Wordsworth was trying to do at the time

“The Keep-Sake” (PW 299) which was published on 17 September has also been traditionally associated with Sara Hutchinson. But the image of Emmeline who “sate and stretch’d/ The silk upon the frame, and work’d her name / Between the Moss-Rose, and Forgot-Me-Not” (PW 299 30-31) could also evoke Annette who, in the style of faithful Penelope, may have worked away awaiting Wordsworth’s return after he left in 1792. In her case the work may have consisted of Caroline’s baby clothes to which she refers in her letters to William and Dorothy.¹⁷ More particularly, Wordsworth himself could be cast as the main character of the concluding lines:

That forc’d to wander till sweet spring return,
I yet might ne’er forget her smile, her look,
Her voice, (that even in her mirthful mood
Has made me wish to steal away and weep,)
Nor yet th’entrancement of that maiden kiss
With which she promise’d, that when spring return’d,
She would resign one half of that dear name,
And own thenceforth no other name but mine!

(PW 299 33-40)

¹⁵ Jim Mays’ headnotes in the PW provide useful accounts of the connections with Sara Hutchinson., and so does George Dekker’s *Coleridge and the Literature of Sensibility* (London: Vision, 1978). For an excellent, recent discussion of Coleridge’s passion for Sara Hutchinson, see Anya Taylor, *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law against Divorce* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

¹⁶ See Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 191: “W, DW arrive at Dover from Calais at 1 am 30 Aug.” They arrived in London around 1 September and left London on 22 September.

¹⁷ See Émile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* (London: Dent, 1922).

In Wordsworth's case, of course, the farewell kiss would have included the awareness of the imminent birth of their child. The spring of peacetime did not come in the following year and a decade later, during the brief respite of the Peace of Amiens, Annette would of course have to resign herself from any hopes of marriage to Wordsworth. Surely Coleridge must have known what a wrench it had been for Wordsworth to leave Annette and their child behind.

"The Day Dream" (PW 294) was published on 19 October 1802 in the *Morning Post* under the title "The Day Dream, From an Emigrant to his Absent Wife." The subtitle itself is suggestive of how, in the early days of their separation in 1792, Wordsworth may well have felt in a similar position to the emigrant husband. His longing for Annette and their child may well have touched his "Heart as with a Baby's finger" (PW 294 6). In addition, the association at the end of the poem of the laughing child with the memory of the absent parent also evokes an image of Annette who would have recognised her lover in the features of her daughter Caroline.

Finally, "An Ode to the Rain", published in the *Morning Post* just three days after "Dejection," had been written a year earlier as "Lines written in Bed in Grasmere" (PW 280) where Coleridge had yet again sought refuge from domestic strife with his friends. In the manuscript version the speaker reproaches the rain for its intrusive presence:

Come, inter nos—(but bye the bye
 You *must* not be *hurt* now) I'll whisper why –
 You know, who's who! Well, he & I
 And she, whom we both call our own,
 Dear Rain! We want to be alone—
 We three, you see—& not one more
 We want to be alone *so sore!*
 We have so much to talk about,
 So many sad things to let out,
 So many Tears, in our Eye-corners
 Sitting like little Jacky Horners—

(PW 280 45-51)

The attempt at light-hearted banter in this address barely disguises the depressed need of the speaker to share his sadness with his beloved friends. The emphasis on Dorothy, William, and Coleridge as a close knit trio highlights Coleridge's need for his friends' exclusive attention. That William and Dorothy would have immediately remembered the original version of "An Ode to the Rain" and its circumstances is confirmed by Dorothy's transcription into William's Commonplace Book: "Lines written by Coleridge in bed at Grasmere on Thursday night October 1st or rather on the Morning of Friday October 2nd 1801—" (PW 1.2 666). The almost pathetic plea for privacy was not included in the *Morning Post* version; instead Coleridge, tellingly, relocated the action to his own home in Keswick, thereby suggesting that Wordsworth and his sister had been visiting him instead of the other way

around. While the manuscript presents the rain itself as the intruder, the newspaper version, *Kubla Khan* style, starts off with a preface which refers to the unwelcome presence of “a very worthy, but not very pleasant Visitor; whom it was feared the rain might detain” (PW 2.2 848). The almost weepy, and certainly needy, confessional lines of the manuscript are now recast in terms of a recent reunion of friends who are all equally impatient for privacy:

Dear RAIN! if I've been cold and shy,
Take no offence! I'll tell you why,
A dear old friend ev'n now is here,
And with him came my sister dear;
After long absence now first met,
Long months by pain and grief beset.
We three dear friends—in truth, we groan
Impatiently to be alone.
We three, you mark, and not one more!
The strong wish makes my spirit sore. (PW 2.2 851)

The newspaper version not only alludes to the painful events of the preceding months which coincided with the Wordsworths' trip to France, it also rewrites Coleridge's usual dependence on his friends' hospitality into a fantasy which portrays him as the host of his chosen circle of friends, even claiming Dorothy as his own sister. The date of publication, three days after Wordsworth's marriage to Mary, ironically underlines how now more than ever Coleridge's wish for a central place in Wordsworth's family had become a castle in the air. Two days later the mock-pastoral wedding announcement confirms the distance between the two homes of the poets as thirteen miles but the gap between the two men had become incalculably wider.

On 20 October, in a letter to Tom Wedgwood, Coleridge refers to the *Morning Post* version of this poem as “feeble” and “unpolished” (CL II 876). This, the same letter to which I referred at the beginning of this article, I now wish to conclude with because Coleridge's insistence on the triviality of the poetry, as opposed to the importance of the prose, is revealing indeed:

I dedicate three days in the week to the *Morning Post* / and shall hereafter write for the far greater part such things as will be of as permanent Interest, as any thing I can hope to write—& you will shortly see a little Essay of mine justifying the writing in a Newspaper. My Comparison of the French with the Roman Empire was very favorably received. —The Poetry, which I have sent has been merely the emptying out of my Desk. The Epigrams are wretched indeed: but they answered Stuart's purpose better than better things—/ . I ought not have given any signature to them whatsoever // I never dreamt of acknowledging either them or the Ode to the Rain.

(CL II 876)

The renunciation of the poetry which he had so eagerly poured into the pages of the *Morning Post* in September and October 1802 suggests to me Coleridge's need to purge his mind from the jealous sadness and the guilt which those poems were associated with. Wordsworth's determined trip to France, his subsequent marriage and settling in Grasmere confirmed a "radical difference" which was not just poetic; it proved that Wordsworth's main interest would from now on always be his own family. In their combined intensity Coleridge's 1802 contributions to the *Morning Post* anticipate the jealous tirades in the Notebooks in which Wordsworth always triumphs as "greater, better, manlier, more dear, by nature, to Woman, than I—I—miserable I!" (CN II 3148).¹⁸ The uncontrollable jealous urge to hurt Wordsworth and his family transpires from the satirical verse demeaning Wordsworth's relationship with Annette Vallon, from the suggestions of sedition for consorting with the enemy, from the stories about betrayal and bigamy in the Lake District, and from the verses rife with accounts of abandonment and loss. While it is somehow understood and accepted that private agony may find an outlet in diaries or notebooks, we are less inclined to consider newspaper publications as a conduit for personal woes, particularly if those publications can be read in a seemingly straightforward fashion. It can be hard to understand that the same person addressed Wordsworth in "Dejection" as "Brother and friend of my devoutest choice," but Coleridge's compulsive need to publicize the turmoil of his soul suggest perhaps his own bafflement at the intensity of feelings, his need to confess or share his pain, and his profound desire to exorcize the darkness by articulating it in a public forum.

¹⁸ See also, for instance, CN II 2001, CN II 2055, CN II 2998 for expressions of guilty jealousy.