Coleridge's Visions of 1816: the Political Unconscious and the Poetic Fragment [1]

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WHAT'S IN A FRAGMENT?[2] This question has preoccupied readers of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" ever since their first publication in a little volume of 1816, where they appeared with a third poem that Coleridge also called a fragment—"The Pains of Sleep".[3] One way of answering the question is to ask what's not in a fragment—what larger body of text, real or imaginary—has been omitted, consciously or unconsciously, from it? Coleridge tells us in 1816 that "Kubla Khan" is a "vision" in a "dream", and that what appears on the printed page is the remnant of "two to three hundred" lost lines composed, but not written down, in a reverie brought on after taking an "anodyne" (a manuscript preface identifies the anodyne as opium).[4] Of "Christabel", Coleridge likewise tells us, "I had the whole present to my mind, with the wholeness, no less than with the liveliness of a vision; I trust that I shall be able to embody in verse the three parts yet to come" (*Christabel* 52). It is only "The Pains of Sleep" whose "whole" is left unexplained: Coleridge does not declare whether it existed in the poet's mind or on paper but merely states: "I have annexed a fragment of a very different character, describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease" (*Christabel* 54). In a letter of 1814, however, Coleridge had supplied, if not a picture of the whole of which "The Pains" was part, at least an indication of its non-appearing cause and subject-matter: the poem was "an exact and most faithful portraiture of the state of my mind under influences of incipient bodily derangement from the use of Opium" (*CL* 3: 495). Opium, it would then be reasonable to conclude, was the material cause of the mental states of which the 1816 poems were fragmentary pictures and "Vision" was his public euphemism for a complex of bodily and spiritual causes and effects dependent on opium eating. The *Christabel* volume was a collection of fragments because to spell out the whole story—that the "psychological curiosit[ies]" which it contained illustrated the mind of an addict—was too shameful (*Christabel* 51).

Yet drug addiction was not the only context that did not explicitly appear: the 1816 volume also omitted the rivalries and alliances with Southey, Scott and Wordsworth that surrounded the composition and publication of "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel". And there was also a context that had surrounded "The Pains of Sleep" when the poem was composed, on a walking tour of

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[2] This paper explores the issue of the relationship of the fragmentary poems Coleridge published in 1816 to the political and personal contexts in which they had been composed years earlier. It speculates that what makes a Coleridgean fragment a fragment is what is left out—contextual material that the author could or would not admit into the published text because it configured divided loyalties, about which he was ashamed and guilty. Contributing to a debate about the ideological function of significant absences in Romantic poetry that Marjorie Levinson provoked by her discussion of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," (1986) the article argues that Coleridge came to practise textual severance—publishing poems and their contexts separately, as if unrelated to each other, so that their origin in writing about which he was guilty and anxious—on political grounds and personal—was not apparent.

[3] See e.g. Marjorie Levinson *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form.* Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

[4] From *Christabel: Kubla Khan, A Vision; The Pains of Sleep.* London: Murray, 1816; cited hereafter as (*Christabel).*

Scotland, in 1803. In the letters and notebooks that Coleridge wrote on that tour, the poem emerges from commentaries on his disturbed sleep, his bodily ailments, his drug and alcohol use (opium, ether and camphor; whisky, rum and porter), and, lastly, his encounters with the Scots Highlanders he meets on the way. It is this context I want to explore in this essay, because I think it holds the key to an issue with which Romantic Studies has been occupied ever since Marjorie Levinson's controversial discussion of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" lines in 1986: the relationship of poetry to political issues and historical events that it does not explicitly discuss. "The Pains of Sleep", I suggest, had such a relationship, evident in the letters and notebooks in which it took shape in 1803 (although this has hitherto been unperceived by critics). Was Coleridge, as Levinson suggested about Wordsworth,[5] omitting from the version of it that he published in 1816 and, therefore from its portrait of the self, issues and events that, its context shows, were essential to its genesis and meaning? Were these contextual issues and events, in effect, part of the whole of which it was a "fragment"? And if so, why the omissions? In the opinion of Hazlitt, Coleridge's fiercest critic in 1816, the Jacobin radical of the 1790s now had recourse to various rhetorical obfuscations, evasions and self-abasements in order to pretend that his reactionary present was consistent with a political past that had never really been revolutionary (*Examiner* 8 September 1816, 571-3). Was the publication of "The Pains of Sleep" as a fragment shorn of its context one of these evasions? I'd like to suggest that thecase is more complicated—especially since the poem is about nightmares whose content and meaning is not fully declared to the dreamer poet. Might the formation of that content by the matters recorded in the poem's context remain unknown to the poet—be, in other words, the poem's political unconscious? In this case, the poem would seem to him a fragment of a lost whole not because it had been consciously separated from its context, but because its relationship to that context had been repressed.

The matter is complex, and the alternatives of conscious separation and unconscious repression are not utterly exclusive of each other. Both might be at work at different times and on different parts of the context: Coleridge consciously accepted more about the mental effects of his opium addiction in 1816 than he did in 1803, for instance, even if he was reluctant to let that acceptance appear in print. His divided political loyalties were also variously accepted in 1816 and 1803, in response to the differing pressures caused by the situations facing him. Was it, for example, conscious sleight-of-hand or an unconscious return of the repressed, or a mixture of both, that led him, after the hostile reception of the *Christabel* volume in 1816, to prepare some of the original context of "The Pains of Sleep" for publication—but shorn of all reference to the poem? In his *Lay Sermon*, an explicitly political work, he published his 1803 encounters with Scots Highlanders for the first time. 1816, then—a year in which revolution was widely expected, so poor, hungry and discontented were the labouring classes—saw Coleridge putting into print his poetical and political writings of thirteen years earlier, but keeping them

[5] Marjorie Levinson. *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

separate from each other, even though they had once been intertwined.

"The Pains of Sleep" in 1803

The Scottish tour that Coleridge undertook in autumn 1803 was a fraught affair. In unrelenting rain, tensions with his travelling companions William and Dorothy Wordsworth grew to such a pitch that, on 30 August, after just a fortnight, Coleridge parted from them at William's suggestion, noting "my words & actions imaged on his mind, distorted & snaky as the Boatman's Oar reflected in the Lake" (*CN* 1: 1473). Feeling misunderstood by the Wordsworths, whose loving companionship made him all the more conscious of his own inability to be with the woman he loved, Sara Hutchinson, Coleridge feverishly embraced his enforced solitariness. Sleeping little, fuelled by a cocktail of drink and drugs, he walked 263 miles in eight days across the moors and through the glens, bleeding and blistered, pushing himself to and beyond the limit of endurance. After a particularly long day on 2 September, he reached Fort William only to collapse at the inn in "hysterical weeping" (*CN* 1: 1487). The following night, anticipating "another Attack of Gout in my Stomach", he took opium—"a violent Stimulus, which kept me half-awake the whole Night" (*CN* 1: 1488). Semi-wakefulness, however, was better than the terrible nightmares which plagued him when fully asleep: these, he noted, were "Horrors [. . .] I truly dread to sleep/ it is no shadow with me, but substantial Misery foot-thick, that makes me sit by my bedside of a morning, & *cry*" (*CL* 2: 982). Using opium to procure rest yet realising that "opiates produce none but positively unpleasant effects" (*CL* 2: 979), Coleridge was, and knew himself to be, in a vicious circle in which his dreams turned the temporal occurrences of the day into a spatial drama "by which the smallest Impulses [. . .] *aggregate* themselves—& attain a kind of visual magnitude, with a correspondent Intensity of general Feeling" (*CL* 2: 974). Among the occurrences thus aggregated were, undoubtedly, his worry that he was diseased, his anxiety about opiates and his fear of sleep itself, mixed with repressed resentment of the Wordsworths and guilty longing for Sara Hutchinson.

Sleep-deprived and hysterical (he recorded three attacks altogether during the tour), Coleridge found himself by day in a peculiarly heightened state of attentiveness. A solitary walker, he recorded in intense detail what he encountered on the way—the almost surreal capacity of the bleak landscape to engender in his mind strange reflections and weird analogies. On 7 September, for example, he exclaimed to his notebook "O Christ, it maddens me that I am not a painter or that Painters are not I!—the *chapped Bark* of the lower part of the Trunk, the Bark like a Rhincoceros rolled in mud & exposed to the tropic Heat". He followed this African image with a further admonition to himself: "Let me not, in the intense *vividness of the Remembrance, forget to note* down the bridging Rock, cut off alas! from the great fall by the beaked promontory, on which were 4 Cauldrons, & a small one to boot—one at the *head* of a second Fall, the depth of my Stick, reflected all the scene in a Mirror—Gracious God/" (*CN* 1: 1495). Crag and waterfall mirrored in rockpools, which become, in what be an allusion to *Macbeth*, cauldrons effecting transformations of perception. So disorientated is he that Coleridge forgets that he is writing—

reminding himself not to neglect to "note down" the scene even while he is noting it down. This was perception at its most revelatory but also at its most disturbing: so maddeningly self-transformative was the stream of images presented to his mind that he had to call on God to help him retain possession of himself.

If the landscape threatened his stability, people he encountered in it also produced disturbing mental images. Everywhere he went, he was shocked by the poverty, the primitive living conditions, the lack of cultivation—all signs of a defeated culture and depopulated country. On 5 September, he was near Fort Augustus noting

> the Women at work/in about a mile from this, on a savage piece of uncultivated ground . . . 8 miserable Huts, a neighbourhood! The best of which would have disgraced a Beaver, or republic of Termites. & out of their low slanting Door *come with a clip five* tall men, wearing on their backs & limbs cloathes-masks of the present Century!—a little way on, another Cluster of Turf Huts with Peat Roofs, wretched as the former[.]
> (*CN* 1: 1490)

Here the Highlands become vertiginous, alien places: he writes of a hut as a Canadian beaver lodge, then an African termite mound. He no longer feels within his native land, but transported to foreign, primitive places and times—and back again—hence his shock that the men who emerge from the hut wear modern clothes, which seem "masks", as if their true apparel should be that of "savages".

Again and again the Highlands played tricks on Coleridge's mind. Near Inverness he saw fieldworkers getting in an oat crop so poor "I thought *they were weeding*—low Oats, so meagre!—and the Harvesters so lazy & joyless!" (*CN* 1: 1496). Incredulous at a degree of demoralisation beyond his experience as an Englishman, he was appalled at Scotland's difference from the Lake District: "deludingly like Ulswater . . . (alas! too few Houses, too little motion)" (*CN* 1: 1469). Faced by this delusive landscape—its beauty concealing terrible poverty, primitiveness and depopulation—the hysterical Coleridge found his Britishness, his pride in national identity, unravelling—a process accelerated by what he witnessed the locals say. Earlier, on 26 August he and the Wordsworths were rowed out to Rob Roy's cave by a man whom he designated a "Jacobin Traitor of a Boatman" (*CN* 1: 1469). Coleridge did not record the words that led him to this designation, but on 31 August he noted meeting "three good Highlanders, two understood & talked Gaelic, the third, an intelligent man, spoke low Scottish only"… "I talked much with the Scotchman—the oppressions of the Landlord—& he used these beautiful words—'It kills one's affections for one's Country, the Hardships of Life, coming by change, & wi' injustice'" (*CN* 1: 1475). Evidently, as the adjective "beautiful" suggests, Coleridge sympathised with the Highlanders' plight and their response to it: they could not be patriots when forced off their patrimonial land by owners who found that they could gain more profit from sheep grazing than from villagers' rents. The clearances reduced the

Highlanders to grinding poverty and to mass emigration, emptying the landscape, destroying clan loyalty and killing patriotic virtue. The boatman, this later note implies, had good cause for his sentiments: the "intelligent" Scots speaker sounds, in his cadenced lament, like the shepherd of Wordsworth's "Last of the Flock"—another victim who protests the political system that impoverishes and deracinates the rural labourer. But the boatman was, nevertheless, not only a Jacobin—as Coleridge himself was still regarded by many—but a traitor. Coleridge's plain words reveal that to protest social injustice was, in the repressive climate of 1803, not just to be political but also to seem treacherous. War had been renewed with France in May, and by autumn a Napoleonic army of 200000 men waited near the channel ports while a fleet of barges was constructed to launch an invasion of Britain. In these tense circumstances, discontented Highlanders were, to English loyalists, a real threat to the nation: after all, such men had been the soldiers who, with French support, had marched on London in 1745.[6] Once a Jacobite, now a Jacobin: the auld alliance of Scotland and France might be renewed under the revolutionary cockade.

Coleridge had been identified as a revolutionary Jacobin in the mid 1790s but had recanted his support for France and declared his loyalty to his native land in 1798, when Napoleon's first army of invasion had gathered on the channel coast. By 1803, the renewed prospect of invasion threatened to bring these dual loyalties to crisis point by forcing him to take one side and so betray the other—as if the coming violence were designed to punish him, whoever won. Thus his encounters with Highlanders were troubling: while they strengthened his sympathy for men made jacobinical by injustice, they also left him guilty that such sympathy made him complicit with treachery to the nation to which he had publicly dedicated his love (see "Fears in Solitude" and "France an Ode").

On 10 September Coleridge arrived at Perth footsore yet exhilarated, exhausted yet sleepless, edgy and ecstatic. He reported his arrival in a letter meant to comfort Southey, whose only child had just died and who, griefstricken and far from his friends, was desperate. Yet the letter was not so much sympathetic as para-pathetic: Coleridge showed Southey how he too had suffered—from appalling health and "dreadful" spirits brought on by "the Horrors of every night"—and sent the lines that became "The Pains of Sleep"—as if to say, "I too am desperate" (*CL* 2: 982). The next day he told his wife that Southey's news had left him "weeping—vomiting—[in] wakefulness the whole night" as if he had overdosed on "some narcotic Drug" (*CL* 2: 985). Thus the poem was avowedly a product of the "hysterical" derangement of body and mind that Coleridge attributed to his morbid sensitivity and that he had hoped to heal, but had in fact worsened, by exercise and by sedatives. Anticipating Southey's disapproval of these methods, he declared, a little guiltily, that he had "abandoned all opiates except Ether be one . . . & when you see me drink a glass of Spirit & Water, except by

[6] Though their march was in fact halted at Derby, in part because French support did not extend to the provision of soldiers.

prescription of a physician, you shall despise me" (*CL* 2: 982). Other letters and notes, however, suggest that this "abandonment" was recent, partial and shortlived.

The letter says nothing about his encounters with "Jacobin traitor[s]", but relates in passing an extraordinary incident that suggests how politically tense Scotland was: "I have been a wild Journey", Coleridge declares, "—taken up for a spy & clapped into Fort Augustus" (*CL* 2: 982). One of several garrison towns built by the English after the Jacobite rising, Fort Augustus was a military stronghold. Evidently, to authorities made jumpy by the prospect of Highlanders joining a French invasion, the arrival there of a dusty pedestrian who was curious about everything he saw and made notes in a book was deeply suspicious. Respectable gentlemen rode on horseback: unkempt and on foot, Coleridge looked like a Jacobin or French agent (as indeed he had in 1797 when a government agent was sent to Somerset to report on his "spying" activities there). And of course, if the authorities had made enquiries, he had a history of published admiration of the French revolution and attacks on the British government, as well as friendships with men who had been tried for sedition. Indeed, in 1795 he had been in danger of arrest when he lectured in Bristol condemning the show trial and transportation to Australia of Scots radicals whom the authorities regarded as republican revolutionaries. Thus, to the Fort authorities it would not have been a difficult decision to arrest a public defender of notorious traitors Joseph Gerrald and Maurice Margarot, and who was interviewing local discontents and recording the defences of every fort that he visited (see *CN* 1: 1490).

Coleridge had reason to know of the dangers of imprisonment for radical activities. In 1801 his Cambridge mentor Gilbert Wakefield had died from typhus caught when he was jailed for writing a seditious pamphlet. Apparently, Coleridge talked his way out of trouble: he was allowed to leave after a breakfast interview with the governor of the Fort, but not before one of the letters he had been writing had been seized—as he reported anxiously to Southey in the same missive as that describing his terrible dreams and enclosing "The Pains of Sleep". Given this textual and temporal proximity, it's unlikely that the nightmares described in the poem—that the poem's very existence as a means of representing his desperate state of being—were not shaped by his imprisonment and by the dangers of Jacobinism and loyalism that the imprisonment dramatised on both personal and national levels. Unspecific though the poem is, it describes dreams which play out dramas of injustice, revenge, conspiracy and complicity, in which Coleridge is both the ashamed perpetrator of guilty violence and a sufferer from it at the hands of his enemies:

> the fiendish Crowd
> Of Shapes & Thoughts that tortured me!
> Desire with Loathing strangely mixt,
> On wild or hateful Objects fixt:
> Pangs of Revenge, the powerless Will,
> Still baffled, & consuming still

Sense of intolerable Wrong,
And men whom I despis'd made strong
Vain-glorious Threats, unmanly Vaunting,
Bad men my boasts & fury taunting
Rage, sensual Passion, mad'ning Brawl,
And Shame, and Terror over all!
Deeds to be hid that were not hid,
Which, all confus'd I might not know,
Whether I suffer'd or I did
For all was Horror, Guilt & Woe,
My own or others, still the same,
Life-stifling Fear, Soul-stifling Shame! (*CL* 2: 983)

Clearly this is not a poem *about* political encounters. But nor is it an *avoidance* of political occurrences or social issues (the poet averting his gaze from what the landscape he travelled through should have shown him, as Wordsworth is supposed to have done in the Wye valley). Rather, it is a commentary on the nature of dreams and the cause of nightmares. "Desire with loathing" is the contradictory mixture that, according to Freud, leads material to be so traumatic that the conscious mind represses it, only for it to return in disguised, symbolic narratives in dreams. On Coleridge's own theory, events that occur in temporal succession are redistributed spatially in dreams—hence the "everything happening at once" effect he describes in this passage. Yet if the confused sequencing and abrupt transformations disguise the traumatic material from Coleridge himself, the poem's context suggests, to readers of his letters and notebooks, its undisguised origin. The trauma stems from his ashamed love of opiates, certainly, but also from his divided political loyalties, brought to crisis point by the feverish encounters with landscape and people that, in his "hysterical" state of being, he endured on his Highland walk. Coleridge both desired and loathed to be a Jacobin revolutionary and a British loyalist: he sympathised with the Highlanders' plight and admired their political diagnosis of their disloyalty to the Crown, yet feared being involved in traitorous violence and being suspected of treachery to a country to which he had declared his patriot loyalty. He respected the would-be rebels and their cause, but left them behind on the road, only to find himself imprisoned, needing to reassure men of power whom he despised that he was on the government side. Surely these compromising and terrifying events induced the guilty desire, frightened anger and ashamed betrayal that the poem portrays as the emotions produced by his nightmares. As he notes, his own contradictions are the cause of the restless mental energy that generates his dream-visions of violence and crime:

Still to be stirring up anew
The self-created Hell within;
The Horror of their Crimes to view,
To know & loathe, yet wish & do!

Here Coleridge's analysis of guilty complicity with transgression is close to that of his explicitly political poem "France: an Ode", in which he depicted the French people's support of Napoleon's imperialist militarism as a masochistic desire for subservience to a tyrannical master who exploited them.

> The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
> They burst their manacles and wear the name
> Of freedom graven on a heavier chain! (*PW* 174, 85-8)

An inability to raise themselves above the dictates of their senses left the French enslaved, yet ready to assist in the enslavement of the hitherto free Swiss (conquered by Napoleon's armies in 1798), thereby betraying revolutionary liberty even while acting in its name. In "The Pains of Sleep" political events are not the ostensible subject matter, but complicity and transgression are once more shown to be at work. They occur in Scotland not France and in Coleridge himself rather than the French people—too close to home for him to acknowledge their cause. Like the French, however, he too is gripped by the sensual in that he is overwhelmed by the power of dream images—derived from sight, hearing and touch—over which the conscious mind has no control. He is enslaved to his nightmares which symbolically refract daytime experiences in terms of power and powerlessness: Coleridge's unconscious, as revealed in the symbolic language of his dream-poem, delivers to his sleeping self a sensory image-stream derived from his traumatic political involvements.[7]

"The Pains of Sleep" in the Christabel volume 1816

By 1816, when Coleridge finally published "The Pains of Sleep", it was for his political involvements that he was chiefly known. Living in London and attempting to manage his opium addiction, he appeared before the public as a political journalist writing anti-Jacobinical articles in the government-funded newspaper *The Courier*—to the dismay of his onetime friends among the radicals. He had produced no book of poems for eighteen years and was anxious about his new volume— *Christabel: Kubla Khan, A Vision; The Pains of Sleep*—being merely a belated printing of some old poems that were already familiar in literary circles (he had long been reciting them as party pieces and circulating them in manuscript). The volume, published at Byron's instigation, was a poetic foray into a metropolitan print culture of which Coleridge was both hopeful and suspicious. In 1816 a reading public more numerous than ever before was capable of bringing a writer huge sales, turning him into a celebrity—as in the cases of Scott and Byron—whose private life then became a matter of public interest. It was, Coleridge declared, an "age of personality"

[7] Cf Frederic Jameson's account of the disguised appearance in texts of a political unconscious: "terms or nodal points implicit in the ideological system which have, however, remained unrealized in the surface of the text, which have failed to become manifest in the logic of the narrative, and which we can therefore read as what the text represses" (48). Frederic Jameson. *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

and he feared that his own personal failings would be made subjects of gossip. (*Friend* 2: 286-7).

The reading public was not only hungry to know about writers' private lives, it was also influenced by reviewing journals to a degree unknown in the 1790s, and these journals were bitterly opposed to each other on political lines. Literary culture was politicised—hence the damning reviews of the so-called Cockney poets for vulgarising the traditional literary language of the educated elite; hence also the vilification of Wordsworth's and Southey's literary experiments as examples of Jacobinism in the *Edinburgh Review*.

It was to avoid such vilification that the *Christabel* volume surrounded Coleridge's old poems with new prefaces designed to set out a favourable mode of reception—a reception theory in embryo; in the same breath, they also tried to place the author above the fray of a print culture both contentious and in thrall to the fickle tastes of a mass reading public more interested in ephemeral magazines and romances than in traditional poetry. They imagined readers as a select audience entranced by a bard; they depicted Coleridge as a dreamer not consciously in control of his writing; they denied that the verse amounted to poetry—as if to excuse him in advance and pre-empt criticism that the contents were unfinished and untraditional. Marketed as "visions" and "fragments", "Christabel", "Kubla Khan" and "The Pains of Sleep" were not quite "poems" and their writer was too dreamy to be held to account in the partisan public sphere: Coleridge, that is, avoided appearing in the volume either as a poet to be judged against other poets, or as the contentious political journalist who had once been a radical critic of government and who now wrote articles calling for radical critics to be arrested.

The effect of the 1816 publication context of "The Pains of Sleep" was to make it doubly a depoliticised poem: if politics was implicitly present in the 1803 poem at the level of nightmare images that symbolise the uneasy Scottish encounters recorded in the notebook and letter context, that context is completely removed in 1816, so that even an unconscious refraction of political encounters is impossible to detect. The *Christabel* volume renders the poem safe, distancing the haunted self that Coleridge portrays in it from his guilt about his attraction to and abandonment of revolutionary politics and about his subsequent conversion to loyalism The poem's final question about "wherefore fall on me" the terrible "punishments" of nightmares can emphatically not be answered "because I have been complicit with these would-be rebels and still sympathise with them yet such sympathies involve treachery to my country endangered by French invasion." Nor can guilt at his gradual abandonment of those sympathies, and his breaking of alliances with radical friends, be adduced as a cause. Instead, the poem appears as another fragment recovered from a visionary's mind, with the social and material influences upon that mind absent—save for the anodyne "anodyne" euphemism for opium. Indeed, in a circular, if implicit, argument the volume suggests that fragmentation is proof of the writer's visionariness: if his mind was not possessed by images and scenarios beyond conscious control it would be possible to render it more comprehensively on paper. What those images and scenarios were, beyond the fragments published, was not explained.

The Context in A Lay Sermon

Coleridge's attempts to pre-empt hostile criticism of the *Christabel* volume did not work. The publication was heavily attacked by reviewers: the authorial persona of its prefaces, far from lifting Coleridge above the partisan public sphere, was judged unmanly and weak. The *Edinburgh Review* judged the poems to be "raving and driv'ling" and "utterly without value".[8] Noting that a recommendation by Byron had helped get the volume published, it belittled this alliance as a marketing strategy—a public relations campaign in which one poet's praise of another was a favour to be called in so as to boost sales when a new volume was to appear. Unable to accept poets' sincerity, or see beyond commercial opportunism, the *Edinburgh* justified Coleridge's fear of reception in print. And it drew attention to a political context about which the volume had remained silent. Those who had echoed Byron's praise of Coleridge, it declared (67), were "the mean tools of a political faction" who lauded the volume because they approved of Coleridge's journalism (in April 1816 he was terming radical campaigners who occupied positions similar to his own in 1795 "incendiaries", "illiberal bigots" and "anti-patriotic patriots" (*EOT* 2: 433-4)). It proved impossible in a polarised public sphere for Coleridge to prevent his volume being judged by association with his reactionary newspaper articles. The published poet and the political pressman were not separable roles.

It was perhaps in acceptance that his poetry would inevitably be coloured by his journalism that, towards the end of 1816, Coleridge reworked some of the models of the author/reader relationship that he had used in *Christabel* in a pamphlet of social and political argument, *A Lay Sermon.* This publication once more tried to pre-empt criticism and rise above the fray, beginning with a tortuous prolegomenon designed to justify the mode of address that Coleridge would employ. Coleridge both beseeched the higher and middle classes to look favourably upon his language, and declared that this language was consistent with his past career: from the start, he stated, he had tried to address political matters through the principles embodied in the language of the Bible. But this strategy was counter-productive: it protested too much, revealing Coleridge's fear that readers would judge his style obscure and his politics inconsistent. As if aware of this, he turned, instead, to another mode of discourse—an "allegoric vision"—that models an ideal scene of oral instruction and reception. Paradoxically, the vision turns out not to be seen but heard and in this respect it revisits the prefaces of the *Christabel* volume—which also depict a visionary relationship between author and reader as an oral inspiration of an audience by a chanting bard.

The "allegoric vision" begins with a gothic tale about journeying through the Apennines with a pilgrim:

> We had not long been fellow-travellers, ere a sudden tempest of wind and rain forced us to seek protection in the vaulted doorway of a lone

[8] Thomas Moore, Review of *Christabel. Edinburgh Review.* 27. September 1816. 58-67, p.67. In *Coleridge: the Critical Heritage.* ed. J. R. de J. Jackson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970. 235.

> chapelry: and we sate face to face each on the stone bench alongside the low, weather-stained wall, and as close as possible to the massy door. After a pause of silence: "Even thus," said he, "like two strangers that have fled to the same shelter from the same storm, not seldom do despair and hope meet for the first time in the porch of death!" "All extremes meet," I answered; "but yours was a strange and visionary thought." "The better then doth it beseem both the place and me," he replied. "From a visionary, wilt thou hear a vision? Mark that vivid flash through this torrent of rain. Fire and water. Even here thy adage holds true, and its truth is the moral of my vision." I entreated him to proceed. Sloping his face toward the arch and yet averting his eye from it, he seemed to seek and prepare his words: till listening to the wind that echoed within the hollow edifice, and to the rain without,
>
> > Which stole on his thoughts with its two-fold sound,
> > The clash hard by and the murmur all round,
>
> he gradually sank away, alike from me and from his own purpose, and amid the gloom of the storm and in the duskiness of that place he sate an emblem on a rich man's sepulchre, or like a mourner on the sodded grave of an only one, an aged mourner, who is watching the waned moon and sorroweth not. Starting at length from his brief trance of abstraction, with courtesy and an atoning smile he renewed his discourse, and commenced his parable. (*LS* 133)

This scene of instruction resembles the preface to "Kubla Khan" in that it highlights vision and trance, and makes a self-authorising citation of Coleridge's own poetry (the "Ode to the Rain"). If the setting is gothic—the chapel-porch, the storm, the comparison to the moonlit atmosphere of "Christabel"—then so is the "visionary": like an emblem on a tomb and a mourner on a grave, he is a marker of death. In this, he resembles the ancient mariner—a man who has a spectral authority, an uncannily familiar other who has seen what ordinary men cannot. His wisdom, therefore, is not assailable by normal social debate. By hearing it, Coleridge gains an otherworldly sanction—a knowledge from the borders of life and death that he can repeat to others—as if he were the mariner's wedding guest turned willing proxy. Thus, by a fiction about oral inspiration that associates him with a wandering seer, he bolsters his authority as a print author preaching about society. A means of establishing his credentials for readers, the scene is an allegory that, as in the *Christabel* volume of a few months earlier, narrates inspiration and transmission as being oral, personal and outside print culture, betokening Coleridge's suspicion of that culture and need for aid in entering it. If not as entrancing as verse, his political writing would at least be a ritualised and potentially holy speech act—a sermon—and if he himself was a lay preacher only, he could claim to have received inspiration from his pilgrim visionary.

If "vision" is a rhetorical strategy borrowed from the *Christabel* volume, it nevertheless acquires greater political valency in the *Lay Sermon*: the

introductory tale gives Coleridge, by association, a visionary authority which, even if borrowed and flawed, gives him more purchase than did the dreamy, forgetful persona of the "Kubla Khan" preface or the divided nightmare sufferer of the 1816 "Pains of Sleep". It enables him to launch a social critique that is not reducible to the agenda of any one party. He benefits from the rhetorical strategy for coping with print culture that he pioneered uneasily in the *Christabel* volume; that volume itself, in retrospect, acquires a political resonance that would not otherwise have been apparent, as an anti-capitalist, anti-print culture publication.

In argumentative prose rather than tale, parable or verse, the main body of the *Lay Sermon* identifies and resists the commodifying tendencies of capitalism and criticises the aristocracy for adopting notions of value that allowed them to enrich themselves at the expense of their tenants' mental and physical health ("Persons are not *Things*" (*LS* 206)). And it introduces what had, in 1803, been the context of "The Pains of Sleep"—the reports of encounters with Scots Highlanders derived from Coleridge's letters and notes. These reports appear with no indication that they had once surrounded the poem he had published only a few months previously: poetical and political author are kept separate from each other as if association with the guilty, terrified, and desperate self-recorded in the poem would undermine the carefully-constructed sermoniser who seeks a consistent position above implication in party conflicts. Nevertheless, having created that position, rhetorically at least, Coleridge can discuss the Highlanders more frankly than he did in 1803. He gives more details of their plight. The clansmen, he shows, are being forced from their rented homesteads to make way for sheep grazing that will accrue more profit to the lairds. This capitalist turn by the landowners is destroying the last vestiges of the loyalty that the chivalric code and the feudal system had perpetuated to the benefit of social harmony and national security. Coleridge then reports more of their speech: their rebellious and violent intentions are now more directly declared—albeit from a perspective whose sympathy is qualified by distance. He quotes one of the disaffected clansmen:

> "If the ----- should come among us, as (it is said) they will, let him whistle to his sheep and see if *they* will fight for him!" The frequency with which I heard, during my solitary walk from the end of Loch-Lomond to Inverness, confident expectations of the kind expressed in his concluding words—nay, far too often eager hopes mingled with vindictive resolves—I spoke with complaint and regret to an elderly man, whom by his dress and way of speaking, I took to be a schoolmaster. Long shall I recollect his reply: "O, Sir, it kills a man's love for his country, the hardships of life coming by change and with injustice!" (*LS* 211)

Coleridge is both more vehement and more cautious in this passage than in his 1803 notebook. He substitutes dashes for the word "French" so as not to raise the spectre, in the revolutionary year of 1816, of treasonable sympathy for Britain's enemy. Likewise, the phrase "Eager hopes mingled with vindictive

resolves" is a detached, abstracted way of hinting that the Highlanders welcomed French invasion and expressed revolutionary intentions of taking revenge on the lairds and masters. "[S]poke with complaint and regret" is a similarly distanced means of suggesting that Coleridge, far from espousing their sentiments, was disgusted by them—and therefore loyal to his king and country, as he expected others of better education to be (the schoolmaster). That the schoolmaster explicates, rather than condemns, their rebellious declarations allows Coleridge to place in another's mouth an implied sympathy for them and a criticism of the governing classes. Rhetorically, the passage delivers a strong critique but leaves Coleridge's own position in the scene veiled: his persona in the *Lay Sermon* of being a disinterested observer is thus maintained at the expense of any exploration of his own political dilemmas, past and present. There is no explicit hint that the divided loyalties that the encounter crystallised left him with political nightmares from which—in the opinion of critics who believed he had betrayed his former beliefs—he had still not escaped. This omission was ultimately limiting: Coleridge was unable to write with a sincerity seen to stem from a principled involvement in the issues of the day—from a thought-through account of his experience of political and social changes—because he was not willing to come to terms in public with his personal history of jacobinical sympathies and divided loyalties, nor with the full extent of his change to anti-jacobinical journalist. His carefully-constructed position of visionary insight depended on reviving his political past only in fragments, detached from their onetime contexts and rewritten in more anodyne terms. Nevertheless, the poetic context did return, if only in the vestigial and disguised form of verbal echoes in the published rendering of the Highland encounters. "Eager hopes mingled with vindictive resolves" echoes the phrasing of "The Pains of Sleep" ("Desire with Loathing strangely mixt, / […]/ Pangs of Revenge"), suggesting that the two texts remained verbally connected (at least unconsciously) despite their separation in print. Apparently, the return of the repressed conflicts of loyalty that were refracted in the nightmare poem's language betrayed Coleridge's act of textual severance.

Disingenuous he may have been; confessional he certainly was not, but Coleridge's partial printing of his 1803 Scottish texts did at least, by keeping his former Jacobinism hidden and putting his loyalty on show, let him articulate a trenchant attack on the changing social mores of the governing classes. His cited schoolmaster—like one of the local authorities who speak in *Lyrical Ballads*—demonstrates that the contemporary equivalent of the feudal world of "Christabel" is in collapse: no warriors or bards will save the day, any more than Bard Bracy did. For all Walter Scott's idealisations of the highland past, chivalry, Coleridge implies, will not be retrieved in the face of the naked commercialism of modern Scotland's Sir Leolines. The *Lay Sermon* is not the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*: Coleridge is not content, as Scott was, to cover contemporary capitalism in the appealing plaid of the old cultural values it had helped destroy. The world of "Christabel" remains in opposition to a modern world that, Coleridge shows, only replaces chivalry with a more self-interested ideology that is epitomised by the heartless "laws" of political economy which justify the greed of the commercialised ruling classes.

Textual Severance

His critique limited by his fear of criticism and the need to defer to the reading public that this fear induced, Coleridge's political vision had limited scope in 1816. He could dramatise, by reworking his 1803 texts, the effects of the exploitation of the poor by the rich, but he could not take a stance on a solution, lest, by advocating reform, he revive his reputation as a 1790s radical and undermine his new-found persona of conservative loyalist. Hazlitt recognised this limitation, and its causes, when reviewing the vision of society expressed in *The Statesman's Manual* as a "voluntary self-delusion" and "hallucination" by which Coleridge hid from himself, and from the reading public, the details of the very different practical political measures he had advocated when a democrat and now, as an anti-Jacobin (*Examiner*. 29 December 1816). Hazlitt probably did not know that the Highlanders in the *Sermon* and "The Pains of Sleep" derived from the same letters and notes (although he visited Coleridge just after the Scottish tour in October 1803 and shared many an evening party with him in the eighteen teens). Now that we do know this, however, we can read the poem and the sermon as complementary texts, whose 1803 intertwining Coleridge could not afford to acknowledge in 1816. Published separately from each other, the two textual fragments suggest that Coleridge's traumatic, drug-conditioned Scottish encounters in 1803, and his anxiety about the reception of his writing in the partisan public sphere in 1816, made him unable to explore explicitly the way his relationship to the political contributed to a self in which guilt, fear and shame were deeply rooted: the poem presents such a self but excludes the political context; the prose includes the political but eschews exploration of a haunted self in favour of the persona of a detached though sympathetic witness of the Highlanders' sufferings. But the haunted self returns in disguised form, at the level of vestigial verbal traces. In the end, both the published poem and the prose are flawed by the conscious separation and the inability to acknowledge the repressed past: Coleridge, as both Hazlitt and De Quincey saw, was unable to explore in print a complex historical self in which the guilt, shame and division caused by his political career and his opium eating was deeply inscribed. Their bare-all autobiographies—*Liber Amoris* and *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*—fetishising frankness, however shameful the details—were Rousseauvian responses to Coleridge's strategy of publishing himself—his textual past—as a visionary retrieved in fragments only.