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Coleridge and Satire in the 1790s

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2020

Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Coleridge's attitude to satire over the 1790s, arguing that a consistent set of methods and principles may be perceived across his satirical writing. Though often dismissed as trivial jeux d'esprit intended for light relief, or partisan lampoons motivated purely by pecuniary gain, Coleridge's satirical pieces in fact reveal a much greater degree of careful thought than might first appear. Focusing particularly on the years between 1795 and 1800, but also making reference to earlier and later writing, the thesis contends that Coleridge consistently sought to address particular concerns about contemporary satirical practice. Part One contends that these concerns drew upon eighteenth-century moral philosophy to assess the ethical consequences of the kind of ridicule and raillery that was ubiquitous in the 1790s political press. Coleridge voices a concerted critical response to the satirical work of political figures like John Thelwall, articulating his concerns in both his prose commentaries and his own satirical efforts. After establishing the importance of this early political context to the formation of his views on satire, the thesis will trace their development over the subsequent years. By 1797, where Part One ends, the rigour of his early response to contemporary satirists had begun to subside, and, during his time at the *Morning Post* (the focus of Part Two), Coleridge increasingly accepted many of the satirical tropes and techniques he had earlier critiqued. Yet despite this gradual shift, his early views do not fade entirely from his satire. The thesis concludes by arguing that Coleridge's encounters at the end of the decade with German literary criticism, and particularly the work of G. E. Lessing, crystallised his incipient attitude to satire into a form that would influence his writing for years to come.

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Abbreviations

BL	Coleridge, S. T. *Biographia Literaria*. Edited by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 7. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
CL	Coleridge, S. T. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71.
CN	Coleridge, S. T. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by Kathleen Coburn, 8 vols. London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-73.
CPW	Coleridge, S. T. *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor*. Edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
EOT	Coleridge, S. T. *Essays on his Times*. Edited by David V. Erdman, 3 vols. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 3. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
Lects 1795	Coleridge, S. T. *Lectures 1795: On Religion and Politics*. Edited by Lewis Patton and Peter Mann. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
Marginalia	Coleridge, S. T. *Marginalia*. Edited by George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, 6 vols. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 12. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980-2001.
Plays	Coleridge, S. T. *Poetical Works: Plays*. Edited by J. C. C. Mays, 2 vols (3 vols in 6). *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 16.3. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
Poems	Coleridge, S. T. *Poetical Works: Poems*. Edited by J. C. C. Mays, 2 vols (3 vols in 6). *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 16.1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
TF	Coleridge, S. T. *The Friend*. Edited by Barbara Rooke, 2 vols. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 4. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
TW	Coleridge, S. T. *The Watchman*. Edited by Lewis Patton, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Declaration

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other institution. The work is solely that of the author, Daniel Norman, under the supervision of Professor Michael O'Neill and Professor Mark Sandy. Part of Chapter Two was published, in an adapted form, as 'Coleridge's Humour in *The Watchman*', *Romanticism*, 25 (2019): pp. 117-128.

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Introduction

Coleridge's satirical writing is often perceived as a trivial, and occasionally troublesome, appendix to his better-known work. In *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Ernest Hartley Coleridge groups together a number of satirical and humorous pieces, ranging from epigrammatic lampoons to longer verse satires, under the heading 'Jeux D'Esprit' near the end of the final volume.[1] The label indiscriminately ascribes a thoughtless and almost throwaway quality to these pieces, implicitly directing the reader to consume them after the supposedly more serious work that precedes them. Derwent and Sara Coleridge go a step further, criticising the 'extravagant humour' of Coleridge's satire and excluding much of it from their 1852 collection altogether (suggesting that it had sometimes been printed more 'with [Coleridge's] acquiescence, than by his desire').[2] These editorial decisions imply that Coleridge's satirical work is something of a distraction or deviation, one that stands in conflict with his broader literary ambitions and must consequently be marginalised or excised completely.

This view continues to linger in critical responses to Coleridge's satirical writing. In a discussion relegated to 'Appendix C' of his *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, Carl Woodring addresses the various satirical epigrams Coleridge wrote over the course of his life, arguing that it is impossible to 'identif[y] his motives, except for a desire to earn (or to get) bread and cheese, mostly by personal lampoon'.[3] Dismissing the seriousness of these pieces, the comment echoes Woodring's similar claims about Coleridge's longer political satires, the 'partisan risibility' of which makes them to his mind mere '*jeux d'esprit politiques*, or political pop-ups'.[4] Adapting the label Ernest Hartley Coleridge also uses, Woodring reinforces this sense that the satires are simply offhand and unimportant doggerel, quickly thrown together in response to current events, rather than deeply meditated and carefully composed. The implication, as with Woodring's comment about the epigrams, is that they were essentially written to order for the newspapers to which Coleridge contributed and thus cannot be credited with any more profound artistic purpose or intention.

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[1] S. T. Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor*, ed Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), ii. pp. 976-87. Hereafter cited as *CPW*.

[2] This remark specifically concerns 'The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone', discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis. S. T. Coleridge, *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Derwent and Sara Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1854 [1852]), p. xii.

[3] Carl R. Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 233.

[4] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 129.

Although subsequent commentators have not been quite so uncharitable, an underlying perception of the satires' frivolity and superficiality has persisted. Donald Reiman notes that Coleridge uses modes of writing like parody 'to balance out the excesses of his serious vein', presenting Coleridge's satire as a kind of foil to his other writing, and a way of avoiding excessive earnestness or sobriety by means of impulsive light relief.[5] This sense of impulsiveness lies at the root of many such interpretations, and is perhaps best articulated by J. C. C. Mays, who contends that 'Coleridge's satirical feelings frequently spun away from the persons they took off from, and took on an almost "pure" life of their own'.[6] Presenting Coleridge's satire as a product of an enthusiasm that carries him away from his original focus, Mays attributes to it a pure and somewhat childlike excitement. Like those of Woodring and Coleridge's previous editors, such comments intimate (albeit much less disparagingly) that we must read the satire simply as an entertaining, often frivolous and light-hearted, addition to Coleridge's better-known work.

Whilst there is indeed a certain amount of impulsiveness in Coleridge's satires, this thesis will argue that his approach to composing them was considerably more calculated and consistent than many have allowed. In order to make such a claim, it is necessary to define exactly what constitutes satire, and how Coleridge himself understood the term and its implications. For Northrop Frye, two fundamental qualities are essential to satire:

> one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack. Attack without humor, or pure denunciation, forms one of the boundaries of satire.[7]

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[5] Donald H. Reiman, 'Coleridge and the Art of Equivocation', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 (1986): p. 332.

[6] J. C. C. Mays, *Coleridge's Experimental Poetics* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 171.

[7] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 224.

Dustin Griffin presents a similarly two-fold definition in his summary of the theoretical consensus around satire. ‘A work of satire’, he writes,

> is designed to attack vice or folly. To this end it uses wit or ridicule. Like polemical rhetoric, it seeks to persuade an audience that something or someone is reprehensible or ridiculous; unlike pure rhetoric, it engages in exaggeration and some sort of fiction. But satire does not forsake the “real world” entirely. Its victims come from that world, and it is this fact (together with a darker or sharper tone) that separates satire from pure comedy.[8]

Of course, neither definition can wholly account for the difficulty in definitively asserting the presence of wit or humour within a text, especially when operating at a remove of several centuries. Similarly, the extent to which a piece serves to attack or denounce can also be called into question, with satirists’ use of humour often softening and even undermining the force of their moral assertions. As such, any discussion of satire must of necessity embrace a degree of ambiguity, and the fact that both Griffin and Frye seek to establish rough boundaries (between satire and ‘pure comedy’ on the one hand, and ‘pure denunciation’ on the other) stands as a testament to this. Satire is often a kind of in-between state or amalgam, one that, as Ruben Quintero puts it, ‘We are better able to circumscribe than define’.[9]

It is for this reason that the thesis does not simply consider ‘Coleridge’s Satire’, but rather ‘Coleridge and Satire’. Focusing chiefly on poetry and prose that may be described as satirical under the terms set out above, the thesis contends that Coleridge himself thought deeply about what satire is and how it operates, and that this thought significantly informed his practice. Although, as each chapter will argue, Coleridge accepted and exploited the intrinsic ambiguity of satire, he would certainly have recognised the rough definitions proposed by Frye and Griffin. A notebook entry from early 1799 pithily echoes the gist of these accounts:

> A Satire like a good Sallad, more oil than vinegar—Yet enough of both.[10]

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[8] Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), p. 1.

[9] Ruben Quintero, ‘Introduction: Understanding Satire’, in *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Ruben Quintero (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 6.

[10] S. T. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), i. 432.25. Hereafter cited as *CN*.

If the oil here is taken to mean humour, the lubricant of conversation, and the vinegar to mean acerbity or invective, then the parallel with Frye and Griffin falls into place. Coleridge makes similar statements elsewhere, professing to Southey for instance that ‘I know more than enough of Scott’s most singular particoloured Rascalities to make a most humorous & biting Satire’.[11] The two descriptors attached to satire here reflect the two properties represented in the salad analogy, reinforcing an impression of satire as a binary or amalgamated mode of writing.

This is not to say that Coleridge started out with a clear conception of what satire is and how he wanted to use it. Starting with his political prose of 1795 (though with references to earlier juvenilia like the whimsical ‘Monody on a Tea-Kettle’), the thesis will trace the development of his attitude to satire until the close of the 1790s, presenting it as a response to three main literary contexts, of which perhaps the most pressing was the political satire of his own day. From early on in his career, Coleridge vocally objected to the way contemporary satirists went about making their cases, particularly taking issue with those who were closer to his own side of the argument, especially John Thelwall. Chapters One, Two, and Three (which together form Part One) will frame Coleridge’s early opinion of satire as a reaction to the kinds of satirical attack that were prevalent in Thelwall’s writing and that of other contemporary satirists. Centring upon the satirical elements, and the reflections on satire, evident in the works Coleridge produced in Bristol and the West Country (namely *The Watchman* and the 1795 lectures and political pamphlets, as well as more explicitly satirical pieces like the Higginbottom sonnets), these three chapters will argue that his negative response to contemporary satire was strongly influenced by the second major literary context: eighteenth-century moral philosophy, and its implications for satire.

Although satire had many defenders in the eighteenth century, there was a significant tradition of scepticism about its potential moral harmfulness. As Chapter One discusses, David Hartley was an important figure in this tradition, incorporating a commonplace eighteenth-century distaste for the uncharitable and vindictive nature of satire into his wider philosophical conjectures about individuals' moral and biological duties and prerogatives. This tradition is reflected in Coleridge's reactions to contemporary satire, which reveal a fundamental concern about the danger of prejudice and vindictiveness that is associated with the act of ridiculing others. In his own satire, Coleridge sought to avoid the risks identified by these theorists by means of the third key literary context identified in Part One: classical satire. Drawing in particular from Horace (although also informed by the contemporary reception of Juvenalian satire), Coleridge began to formulate a new approach to satire, one that exploited its intrinsic potential for ambiguity in order not to feed his readers' prejudice, but to challenge and undermine it. The result is satire that ubiquitously subverts the tropes and techniques of the satirists of his day, drawing attention to the dangers of the genre and encouraging a greater degree of readerly attention and empathy.

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[11] S. T. Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), i. p. 541. Hereafter cited as *CL*.

Composed on Coleridge's own initiative, the satire of this period consistently displays an idiosyncratic inventiveness that is less prevalent, on the face of it at least, in the works discussed in Part Two. Containing Chapters Four to Six, this part examines the satire Coleridge was prompted to produce for the *Morning Post* by its editor, Daniel Stuart, from late 1797. Frequently regretful about having become a 'hired paragraph-scribbler', and about the 'gypsie jargon I am compelled to fire away', Coleridge's satire of this period bears a distinct difference from that which he composed in the preceding years.[12] Rather than creating subversive and idiosyncratic work that communicated his personal principles, he was required to produce material for an existing audience and to satisfy established expectations and leanings. Pieces like 'Parliamentary Oscillators', 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', and 'The Mad Ox' are, as Part Two demonstrates, primarily designed to suit the pages of the *Morning Post* and to fulfil the demands of its editor, marking a significant shift in the flavour of Coleridge's satirical writing and the purposes it was intended to serve.

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[12] *CL*, i. p. 365.

Yet even under these constraints, the personal view of satire evident in his earlier writing continues to be visible, albeit in different, less overt, ways. Coleridge did not abandon his principles, but continued to develop them in dialogue with new source material and scholarly discussions of satire. Foremost amongst this new material were the writings of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, with whose work Coleridge engaged significantly during his time in Germany at the close of the decade. Lessing's discussions of satire, and particularly his work on satire in the epigram, not only provided source material for Coleridge's own satirical writing, but significantly influenced his approach to producing it. Chapter Six, which concludes Part Two (and leads towards the culmination of the thesis's argument in the conclusion), argues that Lessing's reflections on satire crystallised many of the ideas and approaches Coleridge had himself been forming over the course of the 1790s. The turn of the nineteenth century, consequently, forms a natural culmination to the process of development that Coleridge's satirical writing had undergone, resulting in a clearer conception of satire's function and purpose that would continue to lie beneath his writing over the years to come.

Of course, to conceive of Coleridge's satirical writing as having undergone a process of ideological and technical development necessarily implies that he gave at least a modicum of thought to composing it. Carl Woodring's *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge* provides one of the most extensive critical assessments of Coleridge's satire to date, and as such it is far from suggesting that such material was entirely unworthy of consideration. In most cases, however, Woodring is quick to attribute the satire purely to pecuniary and political (rather than aesthetic or philosophical) motivations, an approach immediately evident in the fact that the chapter which discusses most of the satirical works is titled 'Poems for Pay and Party'.[13] Despite this, Woodring is prepared to accept that these 'topical pieces' are 'no less intellectually vigorous or verbally ingenious' than the more 'major' poems, and as such he pays a great deal of attention to frequently neglected poems like 'Parliamentary Oscillators'.[14] For the most part, however, the essential bias suggested by his chapter title does substantially direct the course of his investigation, which often focuses not on the ideas and techniques by which the poems operate, but principally on their political implications and what they reveal about Coleridge's personal inclinations. Certainly, an important consideration, this focus provides important groundwork for a more cohesive examination specifically of the satires themselves and how Coleridge's attitude to the genre evolves over time.

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[13] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, pp. 128-63.

[14] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 129.

Heidi Thomson's recent work on *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper* stands in opposition to Woodring's approach. Focusing on the poems Coleridge contributed to the *Morning Post* between 1799 and 1802, Thomson focuses not on their apparent political and pecuniary motivations, but rather on the extent to which his private emotions manifest themselves despite these ostensible causes. Building on Paul Magnuson's and John Worthen's explorations of the private significance behind Coleridge's public poetry, her primary interest is, as she herself puts it, 'Coleridge's compulsion to publish matters of an extraordinarily sensitive personal nature in the unambiguously public space of the newspaper'.[15] Where Thomson considers his satirical writing, it is always in the light of this awareness, presenting poems that to Woodring seem merely ephemeral squibs as more profound meditations on his personal circumstances. Taking up Thomson's conviction about the private significance behind Coleridge's public poetry, this thesis similarly discerns a deeper strain of thought beneath some of the seemingly conventional and straightforward satires he produced for Stuart. However, where Thomson detects a kind of subterranean and confessional reflection on his own emotional experience, here it is argued that Coleridge's satirical writing reveals an indirect articulation of strong personal views and judgements about satire itself.

John Beer's discussions of Coleridge's satire come closer to this perspective. In *Coleridge's Play of Mind*, Beer seeks to expose an inherent conflict within Coleridge's writing more generally, between carefree playfulness on the one hand and guilty self-consciousness on the other. This conflict, Beer writes,

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[15] Heidi Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper: The 'Morning Post' and the Road to 'Dejection'* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 3; Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons & the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

‘between the sportings of an innocent mind and the abysmal, cavernous darkness of a guilty one [was] never to be resolved’.[16] Though he does not consider a great deal of Coleridge’s satirical material, his extensive application of this thesis specifically to ‘The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone’ in Chapter Three is particularly suggestive. Contradicting claims that the poem is unnecessarily vindictive in its attack on James Mackintosh, Beer upholds Coleridge’s own assertion that it had been written ‘merely in sport’.[17] At the same time, however, he also suggests that this sportive quality disguises a deeper reflection on the artistic processes by which such pieces were composed. What initially seems a straightforward and somewhat offhand satirical slur upon Mackintosh becomes, in Beer’s analysis, part of a more considered meditation on literary genius and the means by which art is produced. Though *Coleridge’s Play of Mind* presents this meditation as a standalone instance of satiric complexity, it is in fact part of a much broader pattern within Coleridge’s work. His satire is always two-faced, always undercutting its own playfulness with subtler and darker implications that prompt the reader to stop and reflect on their true significance.

Beer’s thesis about ‘The Two Round Spaces’ echoes Steven Jones’s broader claim about satire in the Romantic period, in his 2000 work *Satire and Romanticism*. Just as Beer suggests that the poem is not simply an offhand piece of ephemera, but in fact articulates and develops more serious literary concerns, so Jones contends that much of the period’s satire must be viewed as a reflection of (and a reaction to) the issues and ideas that typify what we now think of as Romantic writing. ‘My purpose’, Jones writes, ‘is to identify the ways the terms “Romantic” and “satiric” were constructed through processes of struggle and mutual definition’, a task that in practice involves analysing satirical poems for echoes of, and comments on, non-satirical poems.[18]

In his chapter on Coleridge, Jones focuses on ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, placing it in the context of the Higginbottom sonnets (which, as Chapter Three of this thesis discusses, parody the effusions Coleridge had earlier published in *Poems* in 1796), suggesting that the both poetic projects illustrate the consequences of what he calls ‘romantic excess’.[19] Jones’s argument is thought-provoking, but it is primarily concerned with canon-formation and the criteria by which poems are defined as Romantic. His interest in satire, as such, is limited to an investigation of how it can push against this process of categorisation. Necessarily for a study that covers multiple authors across a wide period, Jones’s analysis does not spend enough time on Coleridge alone to establish significant evolutions or developments within his thought over a period of time. By expanding some of Jones’s claims with the benefit of a greater amount of literary, political, and intellectual context, it is possible to arrive at a slightly more nuanced picture of how Coleridge himself thought of satire, and what he hoped to achieve when writing it.

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[16] John Beer, *Coleridge’s Play of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 6.
[17] Beer, *Coleridge’s Play of Mind*, p. 51.
[18] Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 9.

As far as the immediate satirical context of Coleridge’s satire is concerned, Jon Mee’s recent study of *Print, Publicity, and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s* provides an invaluable resource. Mee’s focus is on the print material produced by the radical societies of the 1790s, particularly in the run up to the government’s orchestrated campaign to suppress them in 1795. His study takes in a range of satire, discussing a number of forms and perspectives in order to illustrate his central contention that print was a ‘condition of possibility for a popular radical platform’, facilitating the ‘emergence of popular radicalism through experiment, contestation, and performance’.[20] Though Coleridge is situated within this intellectual landscape, his relationship to the satire Mee uncovers and analyses is not discussed in detail. On this particular subject, John Barrell’s work on popular radicalism is more detailed. His work on the 1794 Treason Trials and subsequent treason legislation in *Imagining the King’s Death* specifically focuses on Coleridge’s responses to the political and satirical climate of the day in a chapter devoted to ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ (discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis).[21] In its wealth of contextual detail, this study reflects Barrell's other work on 1790s satire, in 'An Entire Change of Performances' and other essays, which provide essential groundwork for broader claims about Coleridge's particular responses to contemporary satire. In exploring these responses, this thesis is indebted to such studies.[22]

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[19] Jones, *Satire and Romanticism*, p. 67.

[20] Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity, and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s: The Laurel of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 1.

[21] John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Where the wider literary context is concerned, it is Dustin Griffin's account of the various satirical traditions from which the period's satire arose, in his *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, that perhaps best encapsulates the satiric persona that it is possible to ascribe to Coleridge. Tracing the growth of satire from the classical period to the present day, Griffin's aim is to '[broaden] our recognition of satiric forms' by illustrating 'satire's immense and perhaps incomprehensible variety'.[23] His particular interest is in its inherent potential for ambivalence, and the fundamental contention of his study is that satire has a tendency to be

> problematic, open-ended, essayistic, ambiguous in its relationship to history, uncertain in its political effect, resistant to formal closure, more inclined to ask questions than to provide answers, and ambivalent about the pleasures it offers.[24]

Though Coleridge's satire is not considered in the book, Griffin's contention captures the essence of it. Not content with the models he saw amongst contemporary satirists, Coleridge actively challenged and problematised the genre he was using, consistently 'ambivalent about the pleasures [satire] offers' and encouraging the reader to 'ask questions' about that pleasure even as he elicits it. Ubiquitously self-critical and provocatively ambiguous, Coleridge's satire was not haphazardly composed merely to please either the reader or himself. It was instead, as this thesis demonstrates, carefully put together to invite scrutiny of the very techniques and motifs it was in the process of appropriating, fundamentally encouraging active engagement rather than passive entertainment.

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[22] John Barrell, '"An Entire Change of Performances?" The Politicisation of Theatre and the Theatricalisation of Politics in the Mid 1790s', *Lumen*, 17 (1998): pp. 11-50.

[23] Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, p. 3.

[24] Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, pp. 4-5.

Part One:
Bristol

Chapter One: Lecturer and Pamphleteer

Coleridge was said to have been an entertaining public speaker in his youth. Joseph Cottle, remembering his 1795 Bristol lectures many years later, noted that his audiences ‘were kept in good feeling, by the happy union of wit, humour, and argument’.[1] This testimony about Coleridge’s public lectures reflects the many contemporaneous accounts of Coleridge’s witty and entertaining conversational style in private, not to mention his own assertions to the same effect in his correspondence.[2] Writing to Thelwall in 1796, for example, Coleridge would proclaim that

> I laugh more, & talk more nonsense in a week, than [mo]st other people do in a year—& I *let* puns [in]offensively [in the presenc]e of grave men, who smile, like verjuice putred.[3]

Such assertions suggest that Coleridge felt more than comfortable using wit and humour to make his points, even in situations where it might be considered inappropriate. Both in private conversation and in public lectures, he seems to have had an irrepressible desire to provoke laughter and to entertain.

With this in mind, one might expect that Coleridge frequently resorts to satire in order to win his lecture audiences over to his position. Yet despite Cottle’s later account, the surviving evidence of the 1795 lectures suggests that they were for the most part not satirical in tone. Though they vigorously denounce the policies of the government, they do not often target the specific individuals responsible for promoting them, and they rarely employ humour to make their arguments. The humorous sections to which Cottle refers, many of which may indeed be described as satirical, tend to be fairly limited, and are often introduced separately from the main bulk of the lecture itself. The ‘Letter from Liberty to her Dear

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[1] Joseph Cottle, *Early Recollections: Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Rees & Co. and Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1837), i. pp. 20.

[2] See for instance Henry Nelson Coleridge’s account of his conversations in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: John Murray, 1836), pp. v-xx.

[3] *CL*, i. p. 262.

Friend Famine', for instance, was reportedly read out by Coleridge in the lecture room, but is unconnected in style and substance from the more serious address to which it was attached.[4]

This disconnect is reflected in the published forms that such material would ultimately take. In *Conciones ad Populum*, the 'Letter' is included in a prefatory section separate from the bulk of the text (the main body of which is then introduced on a new page and with a new epigraph). The same is true of much of the satirical material in Coleridge's published prose of 1795. The 'Letter' represents the longest sustained satirical section among these works, but Coleridge does include several other satirical quips and asides, although these too are often similarly confined to paratexts (errata lists, for example). This sidelining of satirical material bears out Cottle's implication that such inclusions appeared merely to be 'humorous appendages'.[5] They come across as additional material inserted around the outskirts, intended more to keep audiences entertained than to play an important part in the case Coleridge sought to make.

Given this sidelining of satirical material, Coleridge's choice of epigraph in *Conciones ad Populum* is unusual. Lifted from Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*, it quotes the play's protagonist, Dicaeopolis, in the midst of an objection to a political debate:

> so now I've set up my rest here to hoot and obstruct, and rate the speakers, if a word is said except about Peace.[6]

The remark, made at the opening of the play, establishes Dicaeopolis' character and his approach to political argument. An ordinary citizen irritated by the Peloponnesian War, he spends the first scene heckling and ridiculing representatives of the Athenian state at a public assembly, mocking 'all those fine birds, the peacock ambassadors and their swagger' (before going on to ridicule individual members of

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[4] S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1795: On Religion and Politics*, ed Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 29. Hereafter cited as *Lects 1795*.

[5] Cottle, *Early Recollections*, i. p. 182.

[6] J. C. C. Mays speculates that Coleridge became familiar with Aristophanes two years earlier, whilst an undergraduate. J. C. C. Mays, 'Coleridge's Borrowings from Jesus College Library, 1791-94', *Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8 (1985): p. 563; Aristophanes, *The Acharnians of Aristophanes*, trans. W. J. M. Starkie (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), p. 19.

Athenian society, most notably Euripedes, who is compared to the poorly dressed beggar in his play *Philoctetes*).[7] As Helene Foley shows, these jibes were interpreted at the time as direct satirical attacks upon the ruling classes of Athens for their role in the war (which was ongoing at the time of the play's performance), and indeed they seem to have been the cause of an indictment later brought against Aristophanes.[8] In the context of *Conciones ad Populum*'s promotion of peace, and its frustration with the Pitt administration's prosecution of 'an Evil of such incalculable magnitude as the PRESENT WAR', the choice of epigraph is certainly thematically apposite.[9]

Yet it establishes a rather different attitude to satire than that which is actually evident in the pamphlet itself. Rather than ridiculing and provoking laughter to get his way, as Dicaeopolis does, Coleridge's arguments are considerably more sober and straight-faced. In this context, his choice of epigraph may be interpreted differently. Though Dicaeopolis does appear to pursue the same goals as Coleridge, the end result of that pursuit does not mirror the hopes articulated in *Conciones ad Populum* (and the preceding lectures of which it was constituted). Presenting his vision of the ideal attitude to politics in an account of a group he holds to be the exemplary class of democrats, Coleridge emphasises the importance of selfless benevolence. 'These are the men who have [...] made their duty a necessary part of their self-interest', he writes, stating that they must as a result be 'distinguish[ed] by the name of thinking and disinterested Patriots'.[10] The vision stands in stark contrast to the model Dicaeopolis represents. After haranguing and mocking politicians and assorted members of Athenian society, he agrees a private truce with the Spartans (sparing himself but not his fellow citizens from the effects of the war), before ending the play getting drunk with courtesans.[11] Rather than supporting Coleridge's promotion of disinterested service to society, the reference directly contradicts it, placing the epigraph somewhat at odds with the sentiment of the material to which it is prefixed.

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[7] 'But why do I find thee wearing these rags', Dicaeopolis asks Euripedes, ''Tis no wonder thou sing'st of beggars'. Aristophanes, *The Acharnians of Aristophanes*, pp. 91-93.

[8] Helene P. Foley, 'Tragedy and Politics in Aristophanes' Acharnians', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 108 (1988): p. 33.

[9] *Lects 1795*, p. 54.

[10] *Lects 1795*, p. 40.

[11] Aristophanes, *The Acharnians of Aristophanes*, pp. 233-39.

As such, rather than establishing the arguments that are to follow, the epigraph may perhaps be read as a more of a warning. Though Dicaeopolis does not reflect Coleridge's exemplary third class of democrats, he shares much more in common with the second class. Like Dicaeopolis, who heckles from the audience and derides most of those he meets, members of this class are swayed by passionate emotion rather than cool sympathy. Engaging in 'inflammatory harangues', they are provoked into obstructionism by the wrongs they feel they have suffered.[12] The result in both cases is selfishness, with the third class, whom 'Knowledge has not taught Benevolence', failing to help society because they are blinded by their emphatic 'want [of] humanity'.[13]

In choosing his epigraph, Coleridge may be seen to prepare the ground for this argument. By referring to a play in which attempts to promote peace through mocking intrusions and personal ridicule ultimately fail, he sets up his own arguments against such an inclination. Even when read on its own terms, without reference to *The Acharnians*, the quotation reveals flaws in Dicaeopolis's actions. His express intention to 'hoot and obstruct' any speech that does not advocate peace, or in other words to combat aggression with aggression of another kind, implies a fundamental self-contradiction. By opening the pamphlet with this self-defeating satirical aggression, Coleridge implicitly prepares the reader to accept the position he will put forward.

It is only once the reader has read and digested the contents of the pamphlet itself, however, that such an implication can be fully recognised for what it is. On the face of it, the epigraph appears simply an apposite quotation from a classical text, one that expresses frustration and resistance to war and suggests a willingness to use ridicule to advance this case. This chapter argues that the ambivalence of the epigraph in this regard is reflected in Coleridge's 1795 prose as a whole. Though on the one hand it does appear to contain at least some satirical material, it simultaneously seeks to warn readers about the corruptive effect of that very material, encouraging them to recognise for themselves the potential harm it could do.

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[12] *Lects 1795*, p. 38.

[13] *Lects 1795*, pp. 39.

1.1

Looking back over his early writing, Coleridge appeared to regret even the relatively small quantity of satirical material it contained. In a remorseful letter of 1803 to Sir George and Lady Beaumont, he laments the 'ebullient Fancy' and the desire to seem 'wild, & original' that characterised his work of this period, reproaching himself for having 'aided the Jacobins by witty sarcasms'.[1] Such comments imply that his 1790s satire had been the product of rash impulsiveness. Asserting a tendency to 'speak vehemently from mere verbal associations', Coleridge presents his political jibes simply as the unthinking utterances of a young man swept up in a 'turbid stream' of emotion. Whilst there is no doubt that Coleridge could at times be hot-headed, the extent to which he gave unfettered expression to whims and rash inclinations in his satire is not altogether as straightforward as he leads his correspondents to believe. Far from unthinkingly contributing to the Jacobin cause with satirical attacks and witty quips, Coleridge's 1795 political writing in fact shows significant trepidation about radical satire and the use of ridicule to make political points. Explicitly challenging the satirical techniques of noted radicals, especially John Thelwall, Coleridge's lectures and pamphlets reveal an underlying wariness about satire and the effect it is liable to have upon an audience.

As far as the letter to the Beaumonts is concerned, however, commentators have tended to take Coleridge at his word. Jerome Christensen accepts Coleridge's self-justification, affirming that a temporary 'revolutionary surge' of youthful passion had governed his sarcastic political attacks (eventually requiring Coleridge, as Christensen puts it, 'to impose a sovereign control on the republican "ebullient Fancy"').[2] Reeve Parker similarly uses the letter as evidence of 'the self-sufficiency of the poet's excitement', which allowed his writing to take on a life of its own through spontaneous verbal association.[3] To a certain extent, this position does ring true, not least because it reflects Coleridge's own self-analysis at the time. In letters both to his brother George and to Southey, he senses that his speech and writing are coloured by 'the ebullitions of youthful disputatiousness', and that this might lead some to misunderstand him.[4] It is possible, in this context, that the satirical elements of Coleridge's writing are similarly the product of a thoughtless excess of enthusiasm, one that, though he was aware of it, he was unable entirely to control.

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[1] *CL*, ii. p. 1000-1.

[2] Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 66.

[3] Reeve Parker, *Coleridge's Meditative Art* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 88.

The quips and satirical asides in his 1795 political prose do at first appear to support such an interpretation, at least to some degree. Criticising British foreign policy and the pursuit of unnecessary conflicts in his essay 'On the Present War' (in the 1795 pamphlet *Conciones ad Populum*), Coleridge condemns the hypocrisy inherent to war's sanctioned violence. Only 'Fools', he writes, would

> commit ROBBERIES, and get hung, when they might MURDER with impunity—yea, and have Sixpence a day into the bargain![5]

Concluding a paragraph focused not on the war but on the mistreatment of the poor, the line's forceful and yet somewhat tangential quality conveys a sense of unrestrained passion, one that overflows into the errata list, which contains an entry that reads: 'Page 61, for murder read Fight for his King and Country'.[6] Sarcastically adopting and undermining what he felt to be the government's euphemistic language, the comment looks forward to Coleridge's condemnation, in 'Fears in Solitude', of unmeaning military jargon and 'all our dainty terms for fratricide' (discussed further in Part Two).[7] Parodically borrowing and deflating this language by revealing its true implications (namely, 'MURDER'), Coleridge appears, as Lewis Patton notes, to be 'indulg[ing] his vehemence'.[8] Appended to a statement that is already forcefully indignant, his sarcastic quip suggests an inability to resist throwing in an additional jibe at the administration’s expense. Viewed in this context, Coleridge’s later claim to have rashly ‘aided the Jacobins by witty sarcasms’ seems a fairly accurate assessment.

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[4] *CL*, i. p. 125. See also *CL*, i. p. 164.
[5] *Lects 1795*, p. 70.
[6] *Lects 1795*, p. 70 n.
[7] S. T. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 16.1. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), i. p. 473. Hereafter cited as *Poems*.
[8] *Lects 1795*, p. 70 n.

There are, however, not many of these outbursts of mockery, and where they do appear they have a tendency (evident in the placement of this jibe in the errata list) to migrate to the peripheries of the text. The ‘Letter from Liberty to her Dear Friend Famine’, though placed at the start of *Conciones ad Populum*, is similarly removed from the central arguments of the pamphlet, forming another example of the texts’ ‘humorous appendages’ (as Cottle puts it).[9] Though it is longer and less vehement than the ‘MURDER’ erratum, it similarly represents an outburst of feeling on a subject about which Coleridge felt strongly. Presenting Liberty about to leave Britain, writing from ‘Dover Cliffs’ to urge Famine to ‘plead thou my cause’ and to reveal to the population the tyranny under which they live, the ‘Letter’ addresses the poor harvest of 1795 and the consequent rise in the cost of food, which produced near-famine conditions. Though he names no names, Coleridge lays blame at the feet of British politicians, whose warmongering has exacerbated the situation and whose insistence on religious ‘MYSTERY’ (in the form of rituals like fast days) was making a bad situation worse.

Coleridge returned frequently to this issue in his early political writing. Later in *Conciones ad Populum*, for example, Coleridge decries national fasts as ‘Prayers of Hate to the God of Love’ because of the harm they do to the poor, who already have little more than a ‘scanty Morsel’.[10] His handling of the subject in *The Watchman*’s ‘Essay on Fasts’ went further still, resulting in what some critics have called a thoughtless ‘flippancy’ of tone that offended many readers.[11] In particular, Coleridge sorely regretted his ‘most censurable’ use of a quotation from Isaiah—‘Wherefore my Bowels shall sound like an Harp’—for his epigraph.[12] By his own account, the joke cost him a number of subscribers, with his later self-criticisms implying it to be as thoughtless as the ‘witty sarcasms’ described in the letter to the Beaumonts.[13] Although the ‘Letter from Liberty to her Dear Friend Famine’ does not go quite this far, its tone nevertheless contains the seeds of such jokes.

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[9] Cottle, *Early Recollections*, i. p. 182.

[10] *Lects 1795*, p. 65-66.

[11] Stuart Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism: Political Rhetoric, 1770-1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 101; Michael John Kooy, ‘Coleridge as Editor: *The Watchman*, and *The Friend*’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 153.

[12] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 7. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), i. p. 184. Hereafter cited as *BL*.

Like the ‘Essay on Fasts’ (although less controversially), the ‘Letter’ employs biblical imagery to formulate its satirical attack. This is particularly evident in the letter’s representations of politicians who are tainted by corrupt forms of religion, most notably in Liberty’s reference to Gratitude having

> led me (as the Spirit did the prophet Ezekiel) ‘to the Door of the COURT, and I went in, and saw—and behold! every form of *creeping Things*.’[14]

The joke here works on two levels. On the one hand, it implies a sacrilegious quality to the actions of the government by comparing them to Ezekiel’s vision of the desecrated temple at Jerusalem (in which he sees representations of snake-like false gods being worshipped).[15] On the other hand, as the italicisation of the closing phrase suggests, the line contains an additional punning attack upon politicians, one that crops up again four years later in a 1799 satirical epigram on the United Irishmen. Musing as to the one group of individuals who are more ‘viperous’ than his subject, Coleridge settles, in the epigram’s opening lines, on ‘greedy creeping things in place’.[16] The phrasing makes clear that, as in the ‘Letter’, the reference is to placemen or court hangers-on, whose ‘creeping’ nature recalls the ‘low and creeping faculties’ of the dishonest and self-serving critics that Coleridge would condemn in an issue of *The Watchman* a few weeks later.[17] By means of puns and witty recontextualisations, biblical prophecy is thus transformed into a barbed comment on contemporary politics, one that allows Coleridge to vent a longstanding personal grievance.

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[13] *BL*, i. p. 184.

[14] *Lects 1795*, p. 30.

[15] *The Bible*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 911.

[16] *Poems*, i. p. 554.

[17] S. T. Coleridge, *The Watchman*, ed. Lewis Patton, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 2. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 30. Hereafter cited as *TW*.

Other than these assorted instances, however, *Conciones ad Populum* and Coleridge's other 1795 political prose do not indulge extensively in satire. Though frequently impassioned, Coleridge does not usually resort to humour in articulating his arguments and attacks. It is however possible that the lectures on which Coleridge based these works were somewhat more consistent in their satirical edge. The fact that Cottle so distinctly remembers the lectures having been funny (repeating several times that audiences were 'kept in good feeling' by Coleridge's humour) certainly points to such a conclusion. If Cottle is right, then it is possible that the lectures contained more spontaneous ad-libbed sarcasm and satirical denunciation than surviving evidence suggests.

What remains of the lectures does hint at this wit in occasional, and somewhat laboured, attempts at political quips. In the notes for his lecture 'On the Two Bills', which would later go on to form part of *The Plot Discovered*, Coleridge can be seen working out such an aside in the form of a joke at the expense of provincial newspapers. Asserting that they are often in the pockets of the ministry (and thus too ready to parrot the lines of government-influenced London dailies like the *Sun*), he attempts to bring the point home with a joke at their expense, describing them as

> ~~Moons that shine only on enlighten the republican darkness with beams borrowed from the *Sun*~~.[18]

The joke (which, after scoring through the words "shine only on", Coleridge appears to have deleted entirely) perhaps provides a key as to the broader tone of the lectures. Given that he enjoyed improvising puns and jokes (as his correspondence reveals), it is possible that these half-finished jokes in his lecture notes point to the presence of a greater number of impromptu quips in the lectures themselves, quips he preferred to improvise rather than prepare in advance.[19] In this light it is possible that, in his 1795 Bristol lectures at least, Coleridge's reference to having aided the Jacobin cause with his satirical wit was more true than it would at first appear.

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[18] *Lects 1795*, p. 266. The pun on '*Sun*' here implicates the government-subsidised daily newspaper established in 1792 by John Heriot. Michael Duffy, 'William Pitt and the Origins of the Loyalist Association Movement of 1792', *The Historical Journal*, 39 (1996): p. 951.

[19] See for instance his reference to jokes 'slip[ping] out most impromptu-ishly' on *CL*, i. p. 322.

Indeed, many of the quips that remain do, on the face of it, suggest a concerted effort to align himself with radical satire. This is perhaps most conspicuous in *The Plot Discovered*, published in response to the Two Acts in December 1795.[20] Most critical discussions of the work point out the titular reference to Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, the subtitle of which is 'A Plot Discovered'.[21] By appropriating the name of what was felt at the time to be a loyalist play (written, as Thelwall puts it, 'for the purpose of bringing detestation upon the patriots of those times, by representing all reformers as conspirators'), Coleridge sets up the essay's core argument regarding the Two Acts.[22] The government had justified the Acts by claiming that treasonous groups of 'factious and seditious persons' were conspiring to threaten public order and the King himself, both in the form of physical mobs like the one that had attacked the royal procession on 29 October 1795 (which had provided the government with its pretext for introducing the bills), and also in the 'multitude of seditious pamphlets and speeches daily printed' (as the preamble to the first of the Two Acts puts it).[23] Coleridge argues in *The Plot Discovered* that the only true 'conspirators' are instead the 'troops of spies and informers' coordinated by the ministry to attack the 'lives and liberties of the people'.[24] By appropriating and subverting the title of the apparently loyalist *Venice Preserv'd*, Coleridge establishes this argument with another parodic jibe.

In so doing, he conspicuously echoes a widespread contemporary radical satirical trope. *Venice Preserv'd* was licenced for performance on the London stage, and indeed was seen as a play that vilified rebellion and treason, ending as it does in the execution of the protagonists (who had conspired against the Venetian senate).[25] Well before Coleridge's *Plot Discovered*, critics of the government had hit upon the idea of appropriating the plot to condemn Pitt's machinations. An issue of the radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People* from late 1794, for instance, contained a parodic list of plays beside their corresponding patrons, with 'The Prodigal' listed alongside 'His Royal H——' (the Prince of Wales), 'Who's the Dupe' alongside 'John Bull, Esq.', and so on.[26] 'Venice Preserved' is listed about halfway down, and associated with the 'Committee of Secrecy' appointed by Pitt to investigate the seized papers of radical organisations like the London Corresponding Society. As in *The Plot Discovered*, the humour here lies in a reversal of the significance of particular forms of gathering, with the government and its forces, rather than the groups they target, being associated with the conspiratorial plotters.

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[20] There is some debate about the exact date on which it was published, and whether this was before or after the passing of the acts. See *Lects 1795*, p. 278, and Lucyle Werkmeister, 'Coleridge's "The Plot Discovered": Some Facts and a Speculation', *Modern Philology*, 56 (1959): pp. 254-263.

[21] See for instance Werkmeister, 'Coleridge's "The Plot Discovered"', p. 254, and Chris Murray, *Tragic Coleridge* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 62.

[22] Gillian Russell notes that the '*Venice Preserv'd* had been identified as a Tory play in 1682', although, as Russell details, the sympathetic portrayal of the central conspirators frequently provoked controversy and served 'as a rallying point for radicals such as William Godwin' (and, as detailed here, Thelwall). Russell suggests that it was this controversy that 'ensured its continuing success in the nineteenth century when other Restoration dramas were falling into neglect'. Gillian Russell, 'Burke's dagger: theatricality, politics and print culture in the 1790s', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 20 (1997): pp. 4-8. John Thelwall, *The Tribune*, 3 vols (London: J. Thelwall, 1795), iii. p. 313.

[23] See *Lects 1795*, p. 286-87, 298.

[24] *Lects 1796*, p. 287.

Though the similarity suggests that Coleridge may well have got the idea from Eaton's periodical, *The Plot Discovered* also displays an awareness of a much more notorious instance of this trope. As well as appropriating and subverting the plot, government critics had realised that *Venice Preserv'd* itself contained lines that echoed their political agenda. Pierre, a sympathetically portrayed conspirator (and one of the protagonists of the play), speaks the key line in this regard, condemning the corruption of Venetian politicians 'That make us slaves, and tell us 'tis our charter'.[27] Thelwall recognised the consonance of the sentiment with his own arguments against the repressive tendencies of the Pitt ministry, and in February 1794 brought a band of associates to a production of the play at Covent Garden in order to make mischief. Upon the line's delivery, as his biography (purportedly written by his wife) records, Thelwall duly 'commenced a round of applause, which, when finished, he and his friends renewed, and continued their plaudits with vigour'.[28] For Lewis Patton this notorious incident (which was used as evidence against Thelwall in his 1794 Treason Trial) represents a potential source for the joke in the title of *The Plot*

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[25] John Barrell, '"An Entire Change of Performances?" The Politicisation of Theatre and the Theatricalisation of Politics in the mid 1790s', *Lumen*, 17 (1988), p. 14.

[26] *Politics for the People: or, A Salmagundy for Swine*, 2 vols (London: D. I. Eaton, 1794), ii. 269.

[27] Thomas Otway, 'Venice Preserved; or, A Plot Discovered', in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield (Peterborough, On.: Broadview Press, 2004) p. 385.

[28] Cecil Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall* (London: J. Macrone, 1837), p. 286.

Discovered, and indeed its subversion of the play's supposed loyalism certainly coheres with Coleridge's own.[29]

The reference to *Venice Preserv'd*, as such, begins to appear yet another instance of the satirical alignment with the Jacobins that Coleridge would later lament in his letter to the Beaumonts. Borrowing so well-worn a radical joke as this could certainly be read, from one perspective, as a hasty attempt to signal his political stance by means of an image already charged with strong political and emotional connotations. Read alongside the paratextual sarcasm of *Conciones ad Populum*, such details lend support to the position, suggested by Christensen and Patton, that Coleridge did genuinely allow his feelings to run away with him. Even in works like *The Plot Discovered* and *Conciones ad Populum*, which largely make their cases without recourse to jokes and mockery, those feelings occasionally appear to spill over into sarcastic jibes and overtly Jacobin satirical motifs.

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[29] *Lects 1795*, p. 283 n.

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This is not to say, however, that Coleridge's objectives are the same as those of radical satirists like Thelwall and Eaton. In the months before they began their correspondence in 1796, Coleridge took issue with Thelwall's approach to satire and the responses he sought to elicit from his audience. Whilst engaging with Thelwall's work in this way, Coleridge began to develop a conception of what satire is and how it should be used, one that would go on to lie behind all the satirical writing he produced over the course of the decade. In order to understand this dialogue with radical satire, however, it is necessary first to trace the intellectual origins of Thelwall's own satirical strategy. By exploring this strategy in the broader context of eighteenth-century thought, this section will consider the extent to which Coleridge explicitly set his own views about satire against those of his radical contemporaries.

Discussing the Covent Garden incident in a lecture delivered in early 1795, Thelwall connects it with a broader attack on political showmanship. Just as the theatre of the 'declining [Roman] republic [...] was changed into one monstrous puppet-show of splendid exhibitions' (Thelwall censures in particular the slaying of animals for entertainment), so Pitt's government deludes the people with 'public amusements'.[1] Though he briefly addresses the corruptive 'intervention of a Lord Chamberlain' in contemporary drama, Thelwall's main target in this regard is 'the mock realities, or real mockeries, of St. Stephen's Chapel'.[2] Criticising the government's 'mockeries' of justice and popular representation, Thelwall argues that the best means of redressing the balance is through mockery and subversion, in turn, of the political establishment. 'Jacobinical fellows', he writes, used 'lampoons' to challenge Walpole's attempts to 'buy and sell seats in the House of Commons', and contemporary Jacobins, he suggests, must '[expose] the encroachment of corruption' in the same way.[3]

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[1] Thelwall, *The Tribune*, iii. p. 281.

[2] Thelwall, *The Tribune*, iii. p. 282.

[3] Thelwall, *The Tribune*, iii. p. 308.

It is in this context that his stunt at Covent Garden may be best understood. Through this orchestrated act of subversion, Thelwall puts into practice his calls for popular resistance to oppression, staging what Georgina Green has described as 'an opposition between the people [as] audience [...] and the people as performative, appropriating, and [disruptive]'.[4] By encouraging popular mockery of the political establishment's 'public amusements', Thelwall hopes to transform the population from a passive audience into active participants on the political stage. In this way the Covent Garden incident echoes a call he voices throughout his satires and lectures of the early 1790s. In order for the masses to free themselves from the passive 'herd' to which they have been reduced, he urges them actively to ridicule and undermine the efforts of those in power to 'dupe', 'sheer', and 'fleece' them.[5]

This perception of ridicule as a means by which a collective can rally themselves to resist oppression has roots in the theories of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury. In his 1711 *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (one of the most reprinted eighteenth-century books in English), Shaftesbury had laid out an influential model of laughter as an inherently moral force.[6] The 'natural free Spirits', he asserts,

> if imprison'd and controul'd, will find out other ways of Motion to relieve themselves in their *Constraint*: and whether it be in Burlesque, Mimickry or Buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be reveng'd on their *Constrainers*.[7]

For the Whig Shaftesbury, ridicule serves as a political tool by which the oppressed may recognise and resist the actions of their oppressors. This instinctive moral check, naturally occurring in response to the excesses of despotism, inevitably results in a greater degree of 'Buffoonery and Burlesque' in countries where 'Tyranny is highest'.[8] For Shaftesbury, satire is thus a natural and a proportional means of achieving justice: 'The greater the Weight', he asserts, 'the bitterer will be the Satir'.[9] Although, as Michael Billig writes, '[l]ater eighteenth-century writers on laughter rarely cited Shaftesbury by name', his conception of satire as a useful political tool was nevertheless influential.[10] Visible behind many significant works on humour (notably those of Francis Hutcheson), Shaftesbury's vision of ridicule as a natural response to repression provides an important background to Thelwall's radical strategy in the 1790s.[11]

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[4] Georgina Green, *The Majesty of the People: Popular Sovereignty and the Role of the Writer in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 59.

[5] See for instance Thelwall, *The Tribune*, iii. p. 296 (specifically the reference to gamecocks) for Thelwall's suggestion that satire has the ability to arouse listeners from herd-like passivity. For his representation of the masses as sheared sheep see John Thelwall, *Selected Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Judith Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 60-62.

[6] Sankar Muthu, 'Introduction', in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.

[7] Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols (London: J. Darby, 1732), i. p. 71.

From a wider perspective, Shaftesbury's influence on Thelwall has recently been explored by both Judith Thompson and Jon Mee. Following Chris Jones' account of 'Radical Sensibility' and Shaftesbury's legacy in the 1790s, Thompson puts forward the argument (echoed by Mee) that Thelwall 'adapted the Shaftesburian tradition, with its emphasis on free natural feeling united with progressive social goals'.[12] This broad contention helps to explain Thelwall's approach to satirising the government. In a lecture delivered in May 1795, for instance, he mocks William Fitzwilliam (a Whig MP) for his empty criticisms of Pitt, whose 'tool' he had formerly been.[13] Thelwall argues that Fitzwilliam had attempted to assert his principled defiance of Pitt only *after* he had been 'throw[n] away with neglect and contempt', and that his hollow critique was consequently one at which the 'very drivellers in the street' and ‘children themselves would laugh’.[14] Thelwall may be seen to build upon Shaftesbury’s position here, suggesting that the ‘natural free spirits’ of all members of society may, through the use of ridicule, articulate and prosecute valid moral judgements on the actions of individuals like Fitzwilliam.[15]

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[8] Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, i. pp. 72-73

[9] Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, i. pp. 72-73

[10] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 76.

[11] Alfred Owen Aldridge, 'Shaftesbury and the Test of Truth', *PMLA*, 60 (1945): p.148; Werner von Koppenfels, '"Nothing is ridiculous but what is deformed": Laughter as a Test of Truth in Enlightenment Satire', in *A History of English Laughter*, ed. Manfred Pfister (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 58.

[12] Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), p. 29; Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 121.

[13] Thelwall, *Tribune*, i, p. 219. For more on the Fitzwilliam affair see E. A. Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics: Earl Fitzwilliam and the Whig Party, 1748-1833* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p. 176-80; Jeremy Black, *George III: America's Last King* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 373; David Wilkinson, 'The Fitzwilliam Episode, 1795: A Reinterpretation of the Role of the Duke of Portland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 29 (1995): p. 316; William Wentworth Fitzwilliam, *Observations on the Letters of Lord Fitzw-m to Lord Carlisle* (Dublin: Thomas Burnside, 1795), p. 35.

The position underpins Thelwall’s attitude to satire and is restated frequently in his writing, notably in his preface to *John Gilpin’s Ghost*, his satirical ballad of 1795. Here Thelwall states that his aim is to

> excite an innocent laugh at the expence of those who have laboured so ridiculously hard—to make me and my connections according to the old adage, ‘laugh on the wrong side of our mouths’.[16]

The collective laughter of his audience, whom he paints as ordinary (though oppressed) citizens, becomes a form of honest self-defence against the sinister actions of the state. It is in this context that Thelwall’s (and before him Eaton’s) parodic appropriation of government-sanctioned dramas like *Venice Preserv’d* may be usefully conceived. Shaftesbury had suggested that ‘Buffoonery and Burlesque’ provide an effective challenge to oppressive tendencies, and Thelwall, taking the point further, seeks to promote collective ridicule amongst his audiences in order to confront an unjust status quo.

Coleridge, who had been following Thelwall’s career, objected strenuously. Writing in *The Watchman* a few weeks before the start of their correspondence, he vociferously condemned the style of public address associated with radicals like Thelwall.[17] ‘You talk loudly and rapidly’, Coleridge declares,

> You wish to be distinguished from the herd; you like victory in an argument; you are the tongue-major of every company: therefore you love a Tavern better than your own fire-side.[18]

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[14] Thelwall, *Tribune*, i. p. 219

[15] Such a position had been implicit throughout his 1793 periodical *The Peripatetic*, which Thompson singles out as a high point in Shaftesbury’s influence on Thelwall. As in his later lectures, ridicule is held up as a means by which imperious ‘Pride’ and ‘the vacant eye of Foppery’ may be confronted. John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), pp. 307-8.

[16] John Thelwall, *John Gilpin’s Ghost; or, The Warning Voice of King Chanticleer* (London: T. Smith, 1795) p. iv.

[17] That Thelwall is the subject of this attack has been suggested by several critics. See Lewis Patton’s note on *TW*, p. 98, and Nicholas Roe, ‘Coleridge and John Thelwall: the Road to Nether Stowey’, in *The Coleridge Connection*, ed. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p. 67.

[18] *TW*, p. 98.

The contrast between crowded tavern and domestic fireside echoes Godwin's criticism of Thelwall in his *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills*, published the previous year. Godwin had declared that Thelwall's public performances discouraged his audiences from rational thought, arguing that 'Sober inquiry may pass well enough with a man in his closet, or in the domestic tranquillity of his own fire-side: but it will not suffice in theatres and halls of assembly', where arguments must be mixed with the 'spices and seasoning' of 'personality'.[19] Coleridge, ever fearful of the dangers of enthusiasm, reveals a similar wariness of Thelwall's tactics.[20]

The same criticism, though made less strongly, is insinuated in *The Plot Discovered*. As the start of their correspondence in 1796 reveals, Thelwall had been 'offended' by Coleridge's pamphlet, finding the way it had discussed his work 'objectionable'.[21] Despite Coleridge's claims to innocence, it is indeed possible to find potentially offensive implications in the work, for instance in its reference to the government's attempts to suppress Thelwall's activities. '[T]he public amusements at the Theatre are already under ministerial controul,' Coleridge writes, pointing out that if these

> can be legally suppressed by that thing yclept a Lord Chamberlain, in point of literary exhibition it would be unreasonable for Mr. Thelwall to complain.[22]

The remark rests upon an insinuation that Thelwall's rhetoric fits (but does not excel) within the same category as the 'public amusements' to which it is compared, associating his performances with those of London theatrical performances that Coleridge often disparaged and sought, in his own dramatic work, to improve.[23] By associating him in this way with mere 'amusements' (a word that Thelwall himself had used in his campaign to retaliate in kind against the government's 'mockeries'), Coleridge once again points to underlying doubts about his radical strategy.

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[19] William Godwin, *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills* (London: J. Johnson, 1795), p. 20.

[20] On this see also his unexpected praise for the potential of the Two Acts to 'render the language of political publications more cool and guarded'. *TW*, pp. 13-14.

[21] S. T. Coleridge, *Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1932), p. 50.

[22] *Lects 1795*, p. 296-97.

[23] For his disparagement, see for example the criticism of popular plays like Matthew Lewis's *Castle Spectre*, which Coleridge felt to consist largely of 'pantomimic tricks' and '*situations* for ever', with little depth to the plot. *CL*, i. p. 379. It is evident that Coleridge and Wordsworth discussed such degradations of the popular taste, and, as Jane

The passage goes on to insinuate further critiques in its subsequent lines. 'Nothing could make [Thelwall] of importance but that he speaks the feelings of multitudes', Coleridge asserts in one such instance, suggesting that

> The feelings of men are always founded in truth. The modes of expressing them may be blended with error, and the feelings themselves may lead to the most abhorred excesses. Yet still they are originally right.[24]

Here too subtle aspersions are cast upon Thelwall's role as the mouthpiece and channel of what Shaftesbury would call the 'natural free Spirits' of an 'imprison'd and controul'd' population.[25] Coleridge intimates that these natural emotions, though valid in themselves, have been carried to excess in their articulation, tacitly implicating Thelwall as one who 'speaks the feelings of multitudes' (rather than encouraging them to conduct their own 'sober inquiry'). Thus, although the passage is not as overtly critical as that in *The Watchman* (although it was clearly critical enough to offend Thelwall), a consistent objection to the effect of Thelwall's 'amusements' upon their audience begins to become plain.

This criticism of Thelwall was made still more clearly (though from a different perspective) by Gillray in his 1795 caricature *Copenhagen House*. Here Thelwall's assembled listeners are depicted not seriously contemplating or even actively cheering, but grinning and laughing like the stereotypical 'dullard[s]' of eighteenth-century physiognomic treatises.[26] Coleridge, who had not seen Thelwall in

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Moody for instance suggests, these discussions would later feed into Wordsworth's condemnation of the public's 'craving for extraordinary incident' in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*. See Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 55; W. Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and Other Poems*, 2 vols (London: T. Longman and O. Rees, 1802), i. p. xvi. That Coleridge sought to provide more than empty 'amusement' to his own audiences is suggested by Susan Valladares, who argues that he recognised the 'capacity of drama to provide audiences with the vicarious experiences that Coleridge deemed critical for their political and moral education'. Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807-1815* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 75.

[24] *Lects 1795*, p. 297.

[25] Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, i. p. 71.

[26] Compare Johann Lavater's illustrations and descriptions of the 'debasement' evident in laughing faces. Johann Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy; Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind*, trans. Thomas Holcroft (London: B. Blake, 1840), p. 458. On the influence of physiognomy on Gillray see Steve Poole, 'Gillray,

person, could well have taken his cue from such depictions. Echoing Thelwall's own satirical representations of the masses reduced to a passive and regularly sheared 'herd' by political oppression, Coleridge suggests that Thelwall himself in fact has an analogous effect on his own audience.[27] Rather than promoting a considered response to the 'insolent swarm of Priests and aristocratic oppressors', he is instead shown in *The Watchman*, as in *The Plot Discovered*, to gather a similarly unthinking crowd of onlookers.[28]

Coleridge is careful to warn his own audiences about this sort of unthinking laughter. In the first of his *Lectures on Revealed Religion*, for instance, he holds up for castigation the figure of the 'Infidel', who

> with unlearned arrogance and self applauded laugh[s] at the two Laws of Moses—the first—Thou shalt not round the Corner of your Heads, neither shalt thou mar the Corner of thy Beard—The second—Neither shall a Garment of Linen and Woollen come upon Thee.[29]

Such mockery is misplaced, Coleridge argues, because it betrays a failure to sympathise with the intentions of the legislator. The laws in question were in fact designed to outlaw customs associated with 'idolatrous Priests', and in this light the infidel's arrogant laughter forms an almost explicit rebuttal to the Shaftesburian position: rather than expressing honest and valid moral misgivings, ridicule is shown to be the product of a failure in judgement.[30]

The image of the laughing infidel clearly bothered Coleridge, and he returns to it repeatedly in the *Lectures on Revealed Religion* and in his correspondence. Having just met Erasmus Darwin at Derby in early 1796, for instance, he writes at length to Josiah Wade of his disappointment with Darwin's arguments for atheism:

Cruikshank & Thelwall: Visual Satire, Physiognomy and the Jacobin Body', *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (2011): p. 4.

[27] Thelwall, *Selected Poetry and Poetics*, pp. 60-62.

[28] Thelwall, *Tribune*, ii. p.287.

[29] *Lects 1795*, p. 116.

[30] *Lects 1795*, p. 117.

> Not one new objection—not even an ingenious one. He boasted that he had never read one book in defence of *such stuff*, but he had read all the works of infidels! What should you think, Mr. Wade, of a man, who, having abused and ridiculed you, should openly declare that he had heard all that your *enemies* had to say against you, but had scorned to enquire the truth from any of your own friends?[31]

Repeating the point he had made several months earlier in Bristol, Coleridge's analogy reiterates the association between ridicule and a failure in sympathy and intelligence. It also underlines the dangerous influence of social pressure on failures of this kind. The infidel's ridicule betrays a personal intellectual failure, but it is one that is precipitated by the crowd of other 'enemies' jeering along behind him.

In presenting ridicule in this way, he is mirroring an identical argument proposed by Hartley in the *Observations on Man*. Like Coleridge after him, Hartley is preoccupied by the figure of the unthinking atheist who mocks religion unfairly. 'It is all too evident to all impartial observers', he writes,

> that those who disbelieve, or affect to disbelieve, have not made a serious accurate Inquiry; such a one as they would make about a worldly Concern of Moment; but content themselves, and endeavour to perplex others, with general Objections, mixed for the most part, with Ridicule and Raillery, things that are manifest Hindrances in the Search after Truth.[32]

Like Coleridge, Hartley nods towards the social aspect of ridicule. The problem is not just that it waylays individuals in the search after truth, but that it has a tendency to do so for 'others' as well. Far from providing collective liberation, as Shaftesbury had suggested, it in fact has a broader corruptive impact on society.[33]

This must be read in the wider context of the *Observation*'s emphasis on the importance of human sympathy and benevolence. For Hartley, 'Benevolence is indeed the grand Design and Purport of human Life', and the only means by which humanity may '[*work*] *the Righteousness of God*'.[34] He lays great stress on the need to achieve 'unlimited benevolence', exalting a world in which each of us

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[31] *CL*, i. p. 177.

[32] David Hartley, *Observations on Man*, 2 vols (London: J. Leake and W. Frederick, 1749), ii. p. 367.

[33] Hartley makes a similar point about ridicule's harmful influence on crowds on *Observations*, ii. p. 451.

[34] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, ii. pp. 288-89.

‘consider[s] every Man as his Friend, his Son, his Neighbour, his second Self, and love[s] him as himself’.[35] Though Hartley does not condemn ridicule outright (arguing that laughter at mistakes can facilitate social development in certain circumstances, like raising children), he warns that the Shaftesburian conception of a ‘just indignation against vice’ hinders progress towards this ideal in the long run.[36] ‘[I]t is extremely dangerous’, he writes,

> to encourage such a Disposition of Mind by Satire, Invective, Dispute, however unworthy the Opponent may be, as these Practices generally end in rank Malevolence at last.[37]

Read alongside such warnings, Hartley’s description of atheists who ‘perplex others’ forms part of a wider thesis. Though their satire might form some social bonds amongst laughers, its fundamental malevolence nevertheless creates bigger divisions between mocker and mocked, blocking the path towards universal benevolence and frustrating the formation of a wider collective of all humanity.

Echoing Hartley’s conception of ridicule and satire, Coleridge’s writing stands in a broader eighteenth-century tradition of wariness about the harmful aspects of laughter directed at others. Writing in 1711, Joseph Addison, for instance, admits the persuasiveness of Hobbes’s contention that laughter is produced by a sense of ‘superiority’ and a momentary feeling of ‘sudden Glory’ over another.[38] Describing the slapstick street performances of ‘*Maccaronies*’ in Italy and ‘*Jack Puddings*’ in Britain, Addison argues that their humour appeals only to crowds who seek this Hobbesian ‘little Triumph of the Understanding, under the Disguise of Laughter’.[39] Addison’s account of crowds’ ‘empty’ and unpleasant derision would be challenged several decades later by James Beattie, who argues that ‘Jack Pudding is considered, even by the mob, as more rogue than fool’, suggesting that audiences’ derision is not malevolently directed at the character himself, but at his vice.[40] Yet even Beattie's more forgiving view concedes that laughter, despite its benefits, has the potential to render 'man a fiend or a monster'.[41] For Matthew Ward, this qualified approval illustrates that, throughout the eighteenth century, even 'those espousing the benefits of laughter cautioned against it'.[42] Shaftesbury himself had (somewhat self-contradictorily) suggested that ridicule was only a positive force in the hands of '*Gentlemen*' rather than the 'mere Vulgar', acknowledging a similar fear of its potential for misuse by the multitude, and its consequent moral risks. Coleridge's own Hartleian trepidation, in this wider context, is nothing unique.

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[35] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, ii. p. 286.

[36] For more on this social aspect of laughter see Matthew Ward, ‘Laughter, Ridicule, and Sympathetic Humor in the Early Nineteenth Century’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 57 (2017): pp. 732-33.

[37] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, ii. pp. 288-89.

[38] *The Spectator*, 8 vols (London: S. Buckley and J. Tonson, 1712), i. pp. 261-62.

[39] *The Spectator*, i. p. 263.

It does however help to make sense of his attitude to satire in the early part of his career. Writing to Southey in 1794, Coleridge bemoans the 'damned chatter of our mayor, [...] a High Churchman, and a Pittite'. 'I wish, you would write a lampoon upon him', he continues, 'in me it would be unchristian Revenge'.[43] This account of mockery as vengeful impiety looks forward to his preoccupation with the Hartleian figure of the laughing atheist, reiterating the contention that because satire distances individuals from one another, it '*worketh not the righteousness of God*' (as the *Observations on Man* had argued).[44] Far from providing justified Shaftesburian redress for an offence or transgression, it instead represents an unthinking and immoral form of revenge, one that, if allowed free rein, can only 'end in rank Malevolence at last'.[45]

It is this perceived thoughtlessness of satire that particularly bothers Coleridge. Writing to his brother earlier that year, he voices a similarly negative opinion of satire in discussing his old tutor at Christ's Hospital:

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[40] James Beattie, *Essays: On Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind; On Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition; On the Usefulness of Classical Learning* (London: E. and C. Dilly, 1779), p. 309.

[41] Beattie, *Essays: On Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind; On Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition; On the Usefulness of Classical Learning*, pp. 303-5.

[42] Ward, 'Laughter, Ridicule, and Sympathetic Humor in the Early Nineteenth Century', p. 734.

[43] *CL*, i. p. 110. Coleridge implies that, as an atheist, Southey would not be constrained by such considerations.

[44] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, ii. pp. 289.

[45] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, ii. pp. 288-89.

> Mr Bowyer!—indeed—indeed—my heart thanks him! how often in the petulance of Satire, how ungratefully have I injured that man![46]

Conveying the same sense of mockery as somehow immoral or uncharitable, the line emphasises that this manifest lack of sympathy is the product of a kind of childish impetuousness. If only he had taken the time to appreciate Bowyer's positive influence, Coleridge implies, he would not have resorted to so impulsively cruel a mode of attack. Such comments reflect the criticisms he would later make of figures like Thelwall, whose satire encouraged unthinking passivity amongst their audiences. It is precisely because it is unthinking, relying on prejudice and bias, that such laughter at others is so harmful. By promoting it, satire blocks the sympathy that would naturally emerge from deeper reflection.

Yet at the same time these epistolary remarks, both about Bowyer and the Cambridge mayor, do betray something of an instinct to use satire despite these risks. Begging Southey to ridicule the mayor on his behalf, Coleridge effectively confesses that the satirical tendencies of his school days are not altogether behind him: he still feels the impulse to mock strongly enough to flag a target up for his friend. The quips in his 1795 political lectures, and their subsequent published versions, may perhaps be attributed to this impulse. As Cottle records, Coleridge was a performative public speaker and could amuse an audience with his satirical quips and asides.[47] In principle, however, he held an altogether more negative view of this drive to ridicule, and the moral harm it could ultimately do. Coleridge's satirical writing over the course of the 1790s may thus be read as an ongoing attempt to bridge the two instincts. Though he pleases his audiences (and, later, editors like Daniel Stuart) by producing entertaining satire, he does so in a manner that consistently draws attention to the flaws and hazards inherent to the genre.

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[46] *CL*, i. p. 65.

[47] Cottle, *Early Recollections*, i. pp. 20, 22.

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Even in the midst of satirising, Coleridge consistently calls attention to satire's inherent biases and failings. He emphasises a perception of satire as an inescapably subjective tool, one that intrinsically reflects extant prejudice rather than objective truth, with the effect of corrupting the minds of its composer and its audience. In so doing, Coleridge draws directly upon classical satire, and particularly upon Horace. Both quoting sections and borrowing techniques from the *Satires*, Coleridge follows Horace in seeking to prompt readers to change the way they think about satire. Such an endeavour is especially visible in his December 1795 pamphlet *An Answer to "A Letter to Edward Long Fox, M. D"*, which explicitly draws on Horace in responding to an anonymous attack (signed 'A. W.') upon a dissenting Bristolian psychiatrist (the Fox of the title).[1] A. W.'s attack is mostly not satirical, but it does contain various jokes at Fox's expense, and it is in replying to these that Coleridge sets out a broader response to satire's inherently immoral prejudice, and its weakness as a tool of persuasion.

A. W.'s motivation for writing the original attack upon Fox appears to have centred upon his objections to the Two Bills then going through Parliament. In particular, A. W. condemns Fox for having chaired a meeting, three weeks earlier, that had sought to arrange a petition against the bills: 'you call upon the Citizens of Bristol', the *Letter* pronounces, 'in a way calculated to mislead their judgement, inflame their passions, and excite their resentment'.[2] Responding to the accusation, Coleridge addresses A. W. by asserting that it is in fact 'you [who] must be brought in guilty of a most foul slander', before proceeding to demonstrate his point by picking apart the jibes and attacks that feature in the *Letter*.

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[1] An unattributed annotation on a copy of the pamphlet in the British Library (Ashley 2840.2) speculates that the author might be one 'Abraham Wagg, gent—Charles Street'. However, on the basis that Coleridge signed his response C. T. S., Patton conjectures that A. W. may in fact also have been reversed. *Lects 1795*, p. 386.

[2] *Lects 1795*, p. 387.

Coleridge's fundamental contention is not simply that A. W.'s ridicule is overly harsh and unjust, but that it is the product of a fundamental lack of thought, one that has led him to indulge his subjective biases and predilections. This overarching criticism is established in Coleridge's assertion that

> When men are desirous of abusing those whom they do not know, they are apt to look into their own hearts, and having discovered what vices themselves are most inclined to, charge them against their adversaries.[3]

The guilty preoccupations of the critic, Coleridge suggests, inevitably find their way into the criticism: no attack can be wholly objective, or completely removed from the influence of unrelated anxieties or concerns. This is a position that underlies much of Coleridge's writing, and one that, as Christopher Stokes suggests, would become a central concern in his later poems, most especially 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Here the mariner's guilt alters and subverts his perception of the external world, producing what Stokes calls an 'overrunning of subjectivity', revealing the extent to which experience is filtered through personal feeling.[4] The deaths of the mariner's comrades thus sound to the mariner 'Like the whiz of my Cross-bow!', transmuted by what Stokes describes as 'the stain—the alien presence which one fears to confront—that marks the soul'.[5] Coleridge was evidently conscious that strong feeling, if allowed free rein, has a fundamental tendency to influence and corrupt one's judgement.

In the *Answer*, Coleridge's wariness of this tendency is used to point out the inherent bias in A. W.'s jokes and witty barbs. He employs this approach in his response to the *Letter*'s mockery of Fox's use of an (uncommon) one-person carriage, given the epithet 'the little Sulky'.[6] 'Your conduct', A. W. quips, 'has been to court popularity even by the affectation of singularity'.[7] Punning on the term

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[3] *Lects 1795*, p. 330.

[4] Christopher Stokes, *Coleridge, Language, and the Sublime: From Transcendence to Finitude* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 105.

[5] *Lyrical Ballads* (London: J. & A. Arch, 1798), p. 20; Stokes, *Coleridge, Language, and the Sublime*, p. 105.

[6] *Lects 1795*, p. 388.

[7] *Lects 1795*, p. 388.

‘singularity’ to suggest both the doctor’s eccentricity and his unsociability, A. W. succinctly mocks his target with an openly personal attack. Replying in the *Answer*, Coleridge proclaims:

> I should agree with you, Sir! that the “little sulky” is an unsocial vehicle; yet nevertheless I must continue to think, that its greater convenience is a sufficient reason for the Doctor’s having adopted it, unless I see the rich and the great stop their more roomy carriages on the road, and take up into them the maim, the halt, or the blind [...]. But as this is not likely to be the fashion, I cannot think you justified in your attack on the little Sulky, whatever credit I may give you for the wit and *liberality* of it.[8]

The use of the term ‘liberality’ neatly underscores the criticism with a pun of Coleridge’s own. Though from one perspective the line appears to compliment the liberal wit of A. W.’s word-play, Coleridge simultaneously ironically gestures towards its lack of generosity (a connotation Samuel Johnson attributes to the term in his *Dictionary*), in order to underscore the uncharitable nature of the attack.[9] He insinuates that this mockery of Fox’s unsociability, and his implied unwillingness to assist or accompany others, is in fact rooted in an illiberal insensitivity of A. W.’s own.

Coleridge expresses this criticism yet more clearly in a discussion, towards the end of the essay, of the assumed qualities of his anonymous opponent. Addressing the *Letter*’s critique of Fox (and his supporters) for falsely attempting to ‘inflame [the] passions’ of Bristolians, Coleridge writes that ‘you have charged our party with preaching blood and setting the passions of men afloat’.[10] Such a criticism, Coleridge continues, mirrors ‘low women’, who ‘when they quarrel, never omit the vituperative term, strumpet’. In the same way, A. W.’s critique implies his own guilt of the very irrationality and intemperate aggression with which he charges Fox:

> Are you troubled, Sir! like the minister, with an *epileptic* memory? Or have you, Sir! in humble imitation of his favourite foible acquired by hard drinking a perpetuity of blush? Surely [this] must have been the case, or you could not with unaltered features have brought an accusation of *violence!* [11]

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[8] *Lects 1795*, p. 327.

[9] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, 1755), ii. p. 46.

[10] *Lects 1795*, pp. 387, 330.

[11] *Lects 1795*, pp. 330-31.

Coleridge assumes, by means of his logic of overrunning subjectivity (to adapt Stokes' phrase), that A. W. must be guilty of the same irrational and unjust aggression that he criticises in Fox.[12] The references to Pitt enable Coleridge to sidestep the issue of A. W.'s anonymity (and the consequent difficulty of effectively imputing to him a personal vice), by highlighting the hypocrisy of the political figures he supports. In the 1794 Treason Trial of John Horne Tooke, Pitt so frequently evaded questions (repeatedly claiming that he could not remember the information asked of him) that the trial's audience had openly laughed at him in court.[13] Having previously been known for 'the huge and humourless authority with which he spoke in Parliament' (as John Barrell puts it), this provided much-sought-after material for his opponents to satirise, and jibes about Pitt's memory frequently found their way into radical publications after the trial.[14] The same is true of Pitt's drinking habits, which were said to have consisted of the regular consumption of port, reputedly on the orders of his doctor.[15] Coleridge suggests that, like Pitt, A. W.'s 'accusation[s] of *violence*', and his criticisms of radicals' irrational excesses, are rooted in an awareness of the very same irrational uncouthness in himself. He has recognised the vices he is 'most inclined to', in order hypocritically to 'charge them against [his] adversaries'.[16]

Coleridge explicitly frames his critique, in the paragraph previous to this accusation, within the context of classical satire. Explaining his reason for defending Fox, despite being 'a perfect *stranger* to the Doctor', Coleridge cites Horace as his model. To do so he quotes 'the sentence of Horace concerning our duties towards our particular friends' (in which camp he places Fox, as a fellow member of the 'friends of peace'):

> Who basely stabs a patriot's honest fame,

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[12] Stokes, *Coleridge, Language, and the Sublime*, p. 105.

[13] *New Annual Register* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), pp. 280-1; John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 375.

[14] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 374-75; for Thelwall jibes about Pitt's memory loss, see for instance Thelwall, *The Tribune,* i. p. 209.

[15] William Hague, *William Pitt the Younger* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), pp. 25-26.

[16] *Lects 1795*, p. 330.

> Who skulks from his defence, when others blame,
> That man is base![17]

The passage highlights Coleridge's desire not to be one who 'skulks' from the defence of a fellow friend of peace, and it also contains an implied disparagement of A. W., in the first line's criticism of unwarranted defamation. It is a criticism best understood in the wider context of Horace's *Satires* (specifically 1.4), from which the passage is taken. Immediately before this comment, Horace includes an account of 'the implacable Sulcius and Caprius', whom Niall Rudd speculates must be forgotten contemporary satirists.[18] Despite being worthy of 'contempt' themselves, these men 'stalk the streets, with throats horribly hoarse and indictments in hands', promoting contempt of others.[19] Only the 'empty-headed', Horace suggests, can take pleasure in the tactlessly malicious and hypocritical attacks composed by such individuals. In much the same way, Coleridge insinuates that A. W. too will be recognised for the hypocrite he is.[20]

Yet the *Answer*'s reference to Horace also displays an acknowledgement of a hypocrisy of Coleridge's own. Horace's *Satires* 1.4 distinctly calls into question the morality of the satirist himself, in a manner particularly clear in the passage from which Coleridge quotes. Gurion Taussig notes the importance of the quotation to an understanding of Coleridge's conception of his duties to fellow 'patriots', revealing his sense that they are 'bound together in friendship even if they are not personally acquainted'.[21] Perhaps the more revealing aspect of the quotation, however, is what it leaves out. John Davie's recent translation of the same lines exposes the way in which Coleridge, in his own translation of the Greek, disguises their reflexive relevance:

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[17] *Lects 1795*, p. 330.

[18] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, trans. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 18; Niall Rudd, 'Horace and Fannius. A Discussion of Two Passages in Horace, "Serm." 1, 4', *Hermathena*, 87 (1956): p. 49.

[19] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 15.

[20] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, pp. 15-16.

[21] Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship, 1789-1804* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 182.

> The man who runs a friend down behind his back, who doesn't defend him from another's accusations, who wants the public to laugh loud and long at his remarks, and to be thought of as a wit, […] he has a black heart.[22]

When read with its connotations of mocking and encouraging laughter at others, the passage has distinct implications for the satirical persona who speaks it, implications that are lost in Coleridge's looser translation of 'stab[bing] a patriot's honest fame'.[23] Horace's persona, which Jerome Kemp describes as 'by turns glib [and] hypocritical', incriminates his own mockery in this self-contradictory censure of those who mock others. As Emily Gowers notes in her commentary on the passage, this effectively means that 'the irony of having a satirist satirize satirists here is fully exposed'.[24] In sections like these, Horace deliberately and repeatedly flags up the hypocrisy of his own speaking voice.

It is a hypocrisy particularly stark in the discussion of married matrons and prostitutes in Horace's *Satires*. Expressing a preference for the latter, the speaker of one satire argues that they are preferable to the 'forbidden delights' of adultery with the former.[25] Yet the satire unexpectedly ends with an extended section in which the same speaker proclaims his attraction to a married woman, visualising himself being caught by her husband, and forced

> to run for it, tunic undone, to avert disastrous consequences to bank-balance or backside, or, at least, to reputation.[26]

Given the satire's opening chastisement of those who pursue married women (particularly one individual named Villius, who 'was punished richly and more than enough because of his weakness for Fausta'), this closing passage appears quite starkly to contradict Horace's professed principles and advice.[27] The satire provides, in its inconsistent speaker, what Jerome Kemp describes as 'an ironic living example of the particular folly under attack'.[28] By quoting from passages of Horace that point towards this fundamental inconsistency, Coleridge knowingly winks to his readers. Indeed, it would not be too much of a presumption to think that A. W. himself (who quotes in Latin from Statius in his *Letter*) would have sufficient classical literacy to recognise his implication.[29]

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[22] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 16; The original Latin is as follows: 'absentem qui rodit, amicum / qui non defendit alio culpante, solutos / qui captat risus hominum famamque dicacis, fingere qui non uisa potest, comissa tacere qui nequit: hic niger est'. Horace, *Satires*, ed. Emily Gowers, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), i. p. 43.

[23] *Lects 1795*, p. 330.

[24] Jerome Kemp, 'A Moral Purpose, A Literary Game: Horace, "Satires" 1.4', *The Classical World*, 104 (2010): p. 60. Noted in Emily Gower's commentary on the *Satires*. Horace, *Satires*, ed. Emily Gowers, p. 171.

[25] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 8.

[26] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 9.

Once this patent hypocrisy (evident here as throughout the *Satires*) is recognised, it becomes clear that Coleridge's reference to Horace forms part of a wider recognition of the bias intrinsic to his own critique of A. W. This is perhaps most evident in his discussion of A. W.'s invocation of 'Common Sense', which, the *Letter* claims, 'will convince us that the only way to avert [civil war] is to support at the present moment the constitutional government of our country'.[30] For Coleridge, A. W.'s recourse to such unsupported declarations of 'sense' displays his 'blind bigotry', which, he states, is a fault caused by

> that indolence of mind, which they, who are diseased with it, by the alchemistic arts of self-adulation transmute into the honorary title of COMMON SENSE.[31]

On the face of it the comment seems a straightforward criticism of what appears an unsubstantiated assertion in A. W.'s text, attributing it to a laziness in argumentative style.

Contemporary details, however, reveal a deeper personal significance within the statement. At precisely this time, in the final months of 1795, Coleridge's tensions with Southey had come to a head. Southey had withdrawn himself from the Pantisocracy project, citing Coleridge's 'indolence' (as Anya

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[27] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 8.
[28] Kemp, 'A Moral Purpose', p. 60.
[29] *Lects 1795*, p.388.
[30] *Lects 1795*, p. 389.
[31] *Lects 1795*, p. 328.

Taylor and Gurion Taussig discuss in detail) as a major reason for his decision.[32] In a letter to Southey of 13 November (a month before the publication of the *Answer*), Coleridge addresses the complaint:

> My INDOLENCE you assigned to Lovell as the Reason for your quitting Pantisocracy. Supposing it true, it might indeed be a Reason for rejecting *me* from the System. But how does this affect Pantisocracy, that you should reject *it*?[33]

The comment justifies what John Rieder suspects, namely that ‘the problem of indolence seems all too frequently to have inundated Coleridge's entire sense of well-being’ (and it is notable that he does not explicitly deny it in this passage).[34] Conscious of his own tendency towards indolence, or at least towards physical unproductivity (which he admits and attempts to justify in the same letter), Coleridge half-admits to the characteristic in pressing home his critique of Southey’s decision. Read in this context, Coleridge’s disapproval of what he takes to be A. W.’s ‘indolence of mind’ has a double significance, knowingly fulfilling the *Answer*’s contention that ‘abusi[ve]’ men ‘look into their own hearts, and having discovered what vices themselves are most inclined to, charge them against their adversaries’.[35] Coleridge’s charge of indolence thus reflects the hypocrisy of his earlier choice to highlight the fact that A. W.’s wit lacks ‘liberality’ by mockingly punning on that very word. As Kemp says of Horace in *Satires* 1.4, such quips contain within them a fundamental recognition of Coleridge himself as ‘an ironic living example of the particular folly under attack’.[36]

Viewed alongside the *Answer*’s references to Horace, the personal implications of Coleridge’s comments, voiced in the midst of his denunciations of A. W., display a visible alignment of his own speaking voice with that of Horatian satire. Mary Rebecca Thayer attributes this influence to an ingrained and almost subconscious affinity for Latin writers, asserting that ‘Coleridge, like other Englishmen educated in public schools, liked to scatter fragments of Latin throughout his prose'.[37] For Thayer, however, this influence is only skin-deep: '[i]t is not that Coleridge did not know Horace', she writes, 'but simply that he was not affected by him'.[38] Thayer's early twentieth-century study does not consider the *Answer* or indeed any of Coleridge's early prose writings. When these texts are considered, however, a much deeper engagement with Horace becomes plain.

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[32] Anya Taylor, *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love and the Law Against Divorce* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 33; Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship*, p. 137

[33] *CL*, i. p. 171.

[34] John Rieder, *Wordsworth's Counterrevolutionary Turn: Community, Virtue, and Vision in the 1790s* (Newark: Delaware University Press, 1997), p. 87.

[35] *Lects 1795*, p. 330.

[36] Kemp, ‘A Moral Purpose’, p. 60.

It is an engagement best understood in terms of the effect of Horace's satirical method. Horace's hypocrisy, and the many self-contradictions in his *Satires*, ultimately produce a kind of studied ambivalence: as Christopher S. van den Berg puts it, 'We're hard pressed to say what, exactly, satire and its values are when we look to [Horace's] statements'.[39] It is particularly revealing of Coleridge's own attitude to satire, then, that his rhetorical persona in the *Answer* echoes such a writer. Rather than succumbing to A. W.'s unthinkingly harsh mockery of Fox, Coleridge is consistently aware of his own failings, and the presumption that satire demands in passing judgement on others. His quips and criticisms at A. W.'s expense are thus consistently shown to be the products not of an objective assessment, but of inherently biased (and consequently unreliable) personal opinion.

This private recognition of Coleridge's own prejudice plays into the *Answer*'s wider effort to highlight for the general reader the inherent flaws in its critique of A. W. The work is littered with careful cautions about the fallibility and bias of its own speaking voice, with Coleridge asserting several times that 'I have my prejudices', and that his words (though he himself may be convinced of their truth) must be weighed and considered by the reader.[40] Such provisos find their culmination at the close of the work, where Coleridge includes his firmest reference to his own hypocrisy. After spending much of the *Answer* asserting A. W.'s lazy prejudice and unwarranted self-importance, Coleridge moves towards his conclusion by stating that

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[37] Mary Rebecca Thayer, *The Influence of Horace on the Chief English Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), ii. p. 35.

[38] Thayer, *The Influence of Horace*, p. 35.

[39] Christopher S. van den Berg, 'Imperial Satire and Rhetoric', in *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*, ed. Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 268.

[40] *Lects 1795*, p. 329.

> Sir, we plead guilty to a self-opinion of our mental superiority [...] we feel your inferiority painful to us, when you would teach us that the most effectual way "of preventing the prevalence of passion over the reason in the lower ranks" is to take from them all power and exercise of reason.[41]

The passage effectively amounts to an admission of a susceptibility to a disparaging and presumptuous 'superiority' (however strongly he believes it to be warranted) that mirrors A. W.'s own haughty presumption. In gesturing towards this parallel, however, the broader context of the passage intimates a fundamental difference between Coleridge himself and his subject. Where A. W. presents prejudiced opinions as objective principles of 'COMMON SENSE', Coleridge, by contrast, seeks ubiquitously to expose the inherent bias of his own arguments. Phrased another way, Coleridge's admissions of his biased 'self-opinion' (both in explicit guilty pleas like this one and in subtler Horatian self-criticisms) stand in direct contrast to A. W.'s surreptitious attempts to suppress the 'exercise of reason'. Coleridge, unlike A. W., is encouraging readerly independence.

It is in this context that Coleridge's Horatian approach to satire, his foregrounding of partiality within the fabric of the attack itself, must be understood. Though he is clearly indulging a personal tendency towards satirical quips and attacks (a tendency implied by the comments to Southey and his brother discussed in the previous section), Coleridge does so in a way that highlights their inherent flaws. Many of his 1795 prose works and epistolary remarks had presented satire as the product of an inherent failure of sympathy. Relying as it does, in Coleridge's Hartleian view, on prejudice and assumption, satire stands at odds with the calm thought necessary for understanding the motives and feelings of others. In Horace's *Satires*, however, Coleridge appears almost intuitively to find a way around this inherent failing. In keeping with his broader criticisms of A. W. for attempting to 'take from [the lower ranks] all power and exercise of reason', Coleridge creates a rhetoric that is palpably hypocritical and self-undermining, highlighting that a writer's arguments can never be rooted wholly in objective reality, but are always inflected by the biases of 'their own hearts'.[42]

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[41] *Lects 1795*, pp. 331-32.

In *The Plot Discovered* Coleridge quotes from a crucial passage of Horace's *Satires* 1.5 in a manner that succinctly encapsulates this aim, placing it in the context of a discussion of representative democracy. Towards the end of the essay, Coleridge addresses supporters of the government on this topic:

> The people (you say) exercise a legislative power by proxies, that is, by the majority in the House of Commons. But […] [t]he voters are so contemptibly few [and] their charges for voting are so enormous, that [...] in order to be elected by them many men ruin themselves. And for what? from public spirit?[43]

In its criticism of Parliament's institutional corruption, Coleridge's reasoning runs along lines common to his 1795 prose. Crucially, however, it frames the attack as a response to an imagined discursive opponent (evident in the parenthetical 'you say'), presenting the argument as a response to a supposed attempt to gull the British people.

Replying to this imagined argument, and specifically to the rhetorical questions he puts in his opponent's mouth at the close of the passage, Coleridge slips into Latin: 'Credat who likes I am sure "Judæus Apella" will not'.[44] In Horace's *Satires* 1.5 this line ('credat Iudæus Apella, non ego') refers to the gullibility of a proverbial Jew (named Apella), in the specific context of his belief in a miracle that was said to have occurred at Egnatia.[45] It serves as the satire's closing promotion of scepticism, and an injunction to question what one sees and what one is told. The figure against which the gullible Apella is contrasted responds to the supposed miracle very differently, writing that the inhabitants of Egnatia

> gave us the chance to laugh and have some fun, as [they] tried desperately to convince us that incense melts without fire at the entrance to the temple.[46]

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[42] *Lects 1795*, pp. 330-32.
[43] *Lects 1795*, p. 308-09.
[44] *Lects 1795*, p. 309.
[45] Horace, *Satires*, i. p. 47. Davies' translation is: 'Apella the Jew may believe this, but not I'. Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 20.
[46] Horace, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 20.

The attitude intimated here, as Kenneth Reckford puts it, 'tilts the satire decisively towards skepticism'.[47] By closing with this depiction of 'mild satiric laughter' (to use Reckford's phrase), Horace leaves his reader with a final stress upon 'educated mockery', underscoring a perception of satire, if used correctly, as a means of achieving sceptical and thoughtful detachment from attempts at persuasion (a view very different from the Thelwallian conception of satire as an instinctive rallying cry for the oppressed).[48] Coleridge's quotation from this passage reveals an underlying unity with Horace in his approach to satire as a tool. In his imitations of Horatian satirical techniques, and his foregrounding of Horace's endorsements of sceptical rationality and open-mindedness (even with regard to the flaws of his own satirical voice), Coleridge encourages his own readers to adopt the same mentality. By highlighting the laughable corruption of contemporary politics, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the inherent bias and hypocrisy within his own arguments, Coleridge everywhere impels his audience to think for themselves.

Horace's *Satires* thus provide Coleridge with a model for his reflections upon satire. It is a mode of writing, as he intimates throughout his 1795 prose, inherently liable to the subversive influence of unthinking prejudice. Believing, like Hartley, that such prejudice only distances individuals from one another, promoting vindictiveness and malice, Coleridge seeks instead to encourage careful reflection. By drawing attention to the inherent prejudice in his jibes and attacks, he encourages his reader to stand to attention, much as Horace himself had prompted his readers to take an active role in deciphering his *Satires*. This strategic recognition of satire's flaws, even in the midst of satirising, serves as a framework for Coleridge's satirical writing over the years to come.

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[47] Kenneth J. Reckford, 'Only a Wet Dream? Hope and Skepticism in Horace, Satire 1.5', *The American Journal of Philology*, 120 (1999): p. 546.
[48] Reckford, 'Only a Wet Dream?', pp. 543-47.

Chapter Two: Editor

The Watchman is more consistently satirical than Coleridge's preceding published prose had been. Almost every issue contains an instance of witty subversion or satirical attack, targeting not only politicians but many other public figures and members of fashionable society. Some of this mockery, like that of the 1795 political pamphlets, takes the form of seemingly uncontrolled outbursts appended to the text in outrage, rather than carefully meditated constituent parts of a more cohesive argument. In reprinting a parliamentary report from a London daily, for example, Coleridge annotates Charles Grey's assertion that '*there never had been a more successful and glorious war*', adding a simple and derisive asterisked gloss: '!!!!!'.[1] In their standalone and spontaneous nature, such additions echo paratextual sarcasms like *Conciones ad Populum*'s scornful 'MURDER' erratum, appearing the products of an immediate and hot-headed response to perceived errors and moral failings.

For the most part, however, *The Watchman*'s humour is less fiery, and more jovial, than such a comparison would suggest. Whilst there are few puns in Coleridge's 1795 prose, *The Watchman*'s pages are littered with them, both in his own pieces and in the contributions of others that he chose to include. The only epigram printed in the periodical provides a good illustration of this light-hearted wordplay:

> SAID William to Edmund I can't guess the reason
> Why Spencers abound in this bleak wintry season.
> Quoth Edmund to William, I perceive you're no Solon—
> Men may purchase a half-coat when they cannot a whole-one.[2]

The wit here is intricate and multifaceted. Not only punning on the fact that the Earl Spencer (a Whig defector 'bought' by the Tories) shared his name with a type of short jacket, the epigram simultaneously critiques the detrimental effects of the contemporaneous wartime scarcity, of which (Edmund) Burke had publicly warned (William) Pitt on several occasions.[3] This sophisticated, and yet fairly gentle, satire conveys a wholly different impression from the derisive ‘witty sarcasms’ described in Chapter One.[4] It is the product not of impulsive offence but of careful and level-headed thought.

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[1] *TW*, p. 125.

[2] Ernest Hartley Coleridge attributes the epigram to Coleridge (*CPW*, ii. p. 951), but Lewis Patton points out that Coleridge mentions the contribution of a subscriber with the same pseudonym ('Bristoliensis') in the previous issue (*TW*, p. 145 n.). This does not of course stop it from being Coleridge himself, but either way the choice to include the epigram reveals something about the tone he sought to create.

The result is a publication that feels more intimate in tone. Tim Fulford underlines the importance of Coleridge’s humour in creating this sense of intimacy amongst his readers, arguing that his puns suggest an attempt ‘to create a coterie audience, whose sympathy Coleridge could rely on even as he wrote his public work’.[5] Fulford’s claim, made about Coleridge’s style more generally, is reflected in the fact that Coleridge used punning almost as a means of personal bonding with friends. Writing to Thelwall in late 1796, for example, he wishes ‘to God we could sit by a fireside & joke vivâ voce’, revelling in ‘Puns then best when exquisitely bad’.[6] Even the ‘Spencer’ epigram itself lived on in private exchanges, with Coleridge sending it to Wordsworth within a few months of their first meeting, clearly pleased with its cleverness.[7] By including in *The Watchman* this sort of friendly and light-hearted punning, driven it seems more by a desire to have fun than by especially fervent emotion, Coleridge lends the periodical as a whole a personable epistolary quality.

In some respects, this approach may be attributed to the fact that Coleridge knew *The Watchman*’s audience better than that of his previous publications. Where *Conciones ad Populum* and *The Plot Discovered* had been standalone works sold through booksellers, many of *The Watchman*’s subscribers had been personally acquired by Coleridge himself during his tour of the midlands and the north of England in the early part of 1796, when he had lived, dined, and conversed with his audience on a daily basis.[8] Some of these readers would in turn go on to become contributors, encouraged by Coleridge's entreaties for submissions at the close of several issues.[9] Like other periodicals of its day, *The Watchman* feels at times like a small community, and though its readers varied widely in their opinions and backgrounds (as the first section will discuss further), the periodical nevertheless reveals an effort on Coleridge's part to treat his audience almost as a circle of friends.[10]

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[3] See Edmund Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity, Originally Presented to The Right Hon. William Pitt in the Month of November, 1795* (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1800); *TW*, p. 145.

[4] *CL*, ii. p. 1001.

[5] Tim Fulford, *Coleridge’s Figurative Language* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1991), p. 103.

[6] *CL*, i. p. 295.

[7] Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 89.

This attempt to bring readers together lies at the core of *The Watchman*'s satire. Though the intimate and unimpassioned tone of its satire has led some critics to label the periodical 'glib' and inappropriately 'light', Coleridge's jokes in fact reveal a carefully calibrated response to the satirical tendencies of the contemporary press. Whereas both radical and loyalist satirists sought to rally their readerships against one another, using established satirical motifs as banners to announce their targets and intentions clearly and succinctly, Coleridge takes a different approach. Carrying his interest in the ambivalent and self-critical qualities of Horatian satire forward into his 1796 writing and editing, he continues to call attention to the divisive and inherently prejudiced nature of all satire, including his own. By calling attention to these flaws, *The Watchman*'s calculated and inventive wit seeks to unite readers under the single banner of common sympathy and unprejudiced thought.

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[8] See the text of an advertisement for *Conciones ad Populum*, which 'may be had at Reed's Bookseller, Wine-Street', printed on *Lects 1795*, p. 22. For an account of Coleridge's northern tour see Nicholas Roe, 'Coleridge's Watchman Tour', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 21 (2003): pp. 35-46.

[9] Coleridge's friend the Unitarian preacher John Edwards, for example, sent him contributions. See *TW*, pp. 142-45.

[10] Felicity James argues that this was the case with for example the *Monthly Magazine*. Felicity James, 'Writing in Dissent: Coleridge and the Poetry of the *Monthly Magazine*', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 3 (2006): p. 1.

2.1

Coleridge's Horatian approach to satire in *The Watchman* can only be fully decoded with reference to the periodical context of the day, to which he is quite clearly responding. As in 1795, Coleridge's particular concern is with the way in which radicals in particular, and Thelwall especially, used satire to communicate moral and political arguments. Where Thelwall, following Shaftesbury, sought to rally his audiences by means of laughter into collective resistance to oppression, Coleridge is much more wary about the effect satire can have on an audience. This wariness expresses itself in a variety of inventive approaches to formulating the periodical's satirical material. Consistently aiming at subtler, less straightforward forms of satirical attack, Coleridge places greater responsibility on the reader to interpret his wit, often softening and even subverting his own criticisms and denunciations. The result is highly idiosyncratic and fundamentally ambivalent satire, carefully coordinated to avoid the dangers he perceived in the satirical writing of his contemporaries.

From the first issue of *The Watchman*, published on 1 March 1796, Coleridge indicates a perception of his relationship to his audience directly opposed to that of Thelwall. Rather than imagining them as a crowd, to be called to arms against their oppressors by the clarion call of his lectures and poems, he explicitly envisions a different sort of reader, engaged in a different sort of reading. Like many periodicals of the eighteenth century, notably the *Spectator*, *The Watchman* establishes itself in the context of the physical spaces where political information was traditionally disseminated and discussed, namely coffeehouses and (mirroring more contemporary radical periodicals) taverns.[1] In *The Watchman*, however, the relationship is an oppositional one. 'At the alehouse,' Coleridge writes in his 'Introductory Essay,' the poor man

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[1] *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) i. p. 3; see for instance Thelwall, *Tribune*, i. pp. 25, 166.

> meets the Exciseman: and hears his *impartial* invectives against reformers, with scarcely less deference, than when he listens to the equally *impartial* Orator of the Pulpit, who teaches him hatred in the name of the God of Love.[2]

Suspicious of the 'deference' and gullibility of listeners who witness such performances in such settings, Coleridge signals his movement away from them, implicitly criticising orators like Thelwall (who was well-known for addressing crowds at the Globe Tavern on the Strand) for '[loving] a Tavern better than your own fire-side'.[3] *The Watchman* imagines its own reader sat alone by the fireside that had been spurned by such firebrands, as may be seen in an introductory paragraph to an account of a military campaign printed in the seventh issue: 'Let those who sit by the fire-side,' Coleridge writes, 'and hear of [war] at a safe distance attentively peruse the following'.[4] The shift from hearing of war, to perusing details of it, mimics the change in attitude and behaviour that Coleridge seeks to engender. He pictures his reader beside a domestic hearth, not swept up by eloquence and rhetoric, but engaged in the solitary activity of textual scrutiny.

The Watchman's 'sarcasms' make a great deal of sense in this context.[5] More often than not, they appear carefully designed to appeal specifically to a reader, rather than a listener. In a paragraph printed without a title at the close of the final issue, Coleridge appears to retract one of his criticisms of Thomas Beddoes' 'Essay on Pitt,' reviewed in the previous issue. '[I]n our last Number,' Coleridge writes,

> we noticed a degree of apparent illiberality in the introduction of [Beddoes'] eighth Chapter, in which the Archdeacon is represented as an accomplice in his Son's scheme of tying a cannister to the tail of a Dog. On a re-perusal of the passage we perceive that this scheme was conveyed by the Boy in a *whisper* to his Brother, and is not supposed to have been heard by the Father: and such, we are assured, was the Author's intention. Our Readers therefore will consider the reprehension as unfounded.[6]

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[2] *TW*, p. 11.

[3] Cecil Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall*, 2 vols (London: John Macrone, 1837), i. p. 273; Coleridge, in correspondence with Thelwall later that year, denied having implied any criticism specifically of Thelwall in an article on *TW*, p. 98, cf. *CL*, i. p. 205.

[4] *TW*, p. 238.

[5] *CL*, ii. p. 1001.

[6] *TW*, pp. 373-74.

Given the tone of his argument in the original review (which unconvincingly censures Beddoes' representation of 'our dignified clergy'), it is difficult not to feel that Coleridge's tongue is placed somewhat in his cheek. As a listener, this inference is as far as the joke could go.

For a reader however, able to look back over the passage at leisure (and perhaps even to re-peruse, like Coleridge, the 'Essay on Pitt' itself), the true import of the humour may be apprehended. Beddoes' essay, when consulted, confirms the suspicion of Coleridge's sarcasm: it directly juxtaposes the boy's mistreatment of the animal with the Archdeacon's intolerance of French 'dogs', whose recent defeat in battle (against the Austrian General Clairsait) he celebrates in the opening lines.[7] The Archdeacon is thus implicated in the piece's wider critique of military aggression towards the French (which, Beddoes implies, is as cruel and unjust as the boy's 'scheme'), though he is excused immediate complicity in the boy's allegorical prank.[8] By forgiving the Archdeacon this small part Coleridge supports Beddoes' underlying criticism, wryly drawing attention to the character's other faults, namely his support for an aggressive foreign policy and the war with France. Only by reading and contemplating the passage in the wider literary context of Beddoes' original essay, however, can the gesture be fully appreciated.

Coleridge's sarcasm here is fairly mild in its satirical bite. Whilst its witty disparagement of the kind of reader who would object to perceived 'illiberality' does fulfil Northrop Frye's stipulation that satire must use humour in order to denounce (or, as Coleridge puts it, be 'humorous & biting'), it nevertheless stands in stark contrast to the straightforwardly derisive political attacks of radical satirists like Thelwall.[9] Despite this difference, however, the piece does share certain commonalities with such satirists' work, and particularly with that which Michael Scrivener has labelled 'seditious allegory'.[10] The government's increased legislative action against material suspected of treasonous or seditious intent, which culminated in the passing of the Two Acts in December 1795 (and particularly the Treasonable

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[7] Thomas Beddoes, *Essay on the Public Merits of Mr. Pitt* (London: J. Johnson, 1796), p. 139.

[8] Beddoes, *Essay on the Public Merits of Mr. Pitt*, p. 139

[9] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 224; *CL*, i. p. 541.

[10] Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

Practices Act, which facilitated the application of extant treason statutes to reported speech and printed texts), necessitated the concealment of politically radical material.[11] 'Repression,' Scrivener asserts, 'made allegory a useful literary form, the ambiguity of which was convenient at trials,' in theory allowing for reasonable denial of seditious intent.[12]

The most infamous example of such writing was Thelwall's satirical allegory 'King Chaunticlere; or, The Fate of Tyranny,' first printed in Daniel Isaac Eaton's periodical *Politics for the People*. Thelwall's prose narrative relates an overtly political anecdote about a 'haughty, sanguinary' 'game cock' that is decapitated, much to the relief of the 'more industrious birds' he had tyrannised.[13] Thelwall's allegory conceals, or at least goes some way towards concealing, what might be interpreted if not as an actionable threat against the monarch, at least as politically incendiary satire (and indeed Eaton was ultimately prosecuted for publishing it).[14] Coleridge's deliberately oblique endorsement of Beddoes' metaphorical critique of the clergy at first appears to act in a similar way, superficially denying the significance of the metaphor whilst in reality confirming the underlying point. Sensitive to the allegory, Coleridge similarly seems to disguise his true meaning behind a protective, but nevertheless decipherable, mask.

Yet criticising a clergyman for celebrating an Austrian victory is not treason or sedition, and Coleridge's reason for employing this humorous mask cannot be attributed simply to a desire to avoid prosecution under those charges. Where Thelwall's 'King Chaunticlere' uses metaphor satirically to disguise a political attack, Coleridge's satirical wit in *The Watchman* acts differently. It is a difference most perceptible in jokes conspicuously framed in the context of Thelwallian satire, notably the eighth issue's 'War: A New Mode Recommended'. This section half-jokingly proposes a less harmful manner of conducting battles:

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[11] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 573-74.
[12] Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*, p. 12.
[13] *Politics for the People*, i. p. 104.
[14] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 104.

> Would it not be a better way of settling national disputes, if, instead of employing men and blood-hounds in our armies, we were to employ either game-cocks, or such other animals as are known to possess courage and ferocity.[15]

The term 'game-cocks', and later in the passage 'chanticleers', immediately intimates a radical allegorical significance to the piece. It is a significance that would have been at the forefront of readers' minds after Thelwall reintroduced 'King Chaunticlere' late the previous year, in *John Gilpin's Ghost: or the Warning Voice of King Chanticleer* (a satirical ballad that explicitly confirmed the seditious association between the beheaded gamecock and the monarchy).[16] 'War: a New Mode Recommended', from the outset, conspicuously places itself within this context.

Yet it is not, as one might initially suspect, lifted from one of Eaton's radical publications. It is instead an anonymous contribution taken from an April issue of Benjamin Flower's *Cambridge Intelligencer*, a periodical that by 1796 had a diverse national readership, and a more measured approach to criticism of the government than the coarsely satirical *Politics for the People*.[17] The passage's political implications are, as such, not what they first seem. Aside from the plurality of the chanticleers, and thus the grammatical difficulty of an association with George III himself, their role makes sense only if they specifically do not refer to monarchs: their deaths are directly opposed to human deaths, intended to prevent, not allegorise, the 'cutting [of] the throats of men'.[18] The piece thus intimates and then neutralises a political metaphor, deflating expectations of overt republicanism and abruptly undercutting the initially suggested allegory.

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[15] *TW*, pp. 275-6.

[16] Thelwall, *John Gilpin's Ghost; or, the Warning Voice of King Chanticleer: an Historical Ballad* (London: T. Smith, 1795); Damian Walford Davies, 'Capital Crimes: John Thelwall, "Gallucide" and Psychobiography', *Romanticism*, 18 (2012): p. 57.

[17] *Cambridge Intelligencer*, 16 Apr. 1796, British Library MFM.M41259; M. J. Murphy, 'Newspapers and Opinion in Cambridge, 1780–1850', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 6 (1972): p. 41; the opening editorial of the first issue supports 'the preservation of the just prerogatives of the Crown', and stresses Flower's desire to promote 'peaceable and constitutional' discussion: *Cambridge Intelligencer*, 20 Jul. 1793, British Library MFM.M41259.

[18] *TW*, p. 276.

Coleridge's inclusion of this misleading article, with its unmistakable topical relevance, may be interpreted in the context of his own and Eaton's audiences. *Politics for the People*, which was sold for just two pence, primarily (though not solely) appealed to labouring class radical readers, and its overt and exuberant radicalism makes sense in that respect.[19] The second issue, for example, opens with an account of an 'honest cobler' who, upon meeting a 'polite Courtier,' instructs him to '*kiss my a—se*', mirroring, and providing a model for, his plebeian readers' attitudes to social elites and those in power.[20] The readership Coleridge addresses, by contrast, was ideologically much broader. Contemporary letters and later anecdotes indicate that he pitched *The Watchman* (priced at four pence, double the cost of *Politics for the People*) to everyone from tallow chandlers to aristocrats, although the majority of his audience were middle-class dissenters (whose subscriptions were personally gathered during his tour of the midlands and northern England in early 1796).[21] The views of this large section of Coleridge's readership, especially with regard to republicanism, were more various than those of the London-based labouring-class audience to which Eaton addressed *Politics for the People*.[22] Where many of Coleridge's dissenting readers, like the Unitarian preacher John Edwards (who went on to contribute to later issues of the periodical), had voiced outspoken support for the Revolution and called for 'the downfall of tyranny' in Britain, still others were more conservative in their outlook.[23] Industrialists and business owners, for instance, like the draper and Presbyterian Congregationalist Martin Barr (with whose family Coleridge spent an evening in Worcester), had a greater attachment to, and indeed a vested interest in, the 'older establishment' (as Robin Whittaker puts it).[24] Many of these readers took a dimmer view of Thelwallian radical insurgency, conscious, for instance, of the effect its ideals might have on trade.[25] Had 'War: A New Mode Recommended' delivered on its allegorical implications, Coleridge would not have struck a chord with this significant portion of his audience.

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[19] Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Republican Politics and English Poetry, 1789-1874* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 186.

[20] *Politics for the People*, i. p. 13. For a discussion of *Politics for the People*'s appeal to a plebeian audience see: John Barrell, 'Radicalism, Visual Culture, and Spectacle in the 1790s', *Romanticism on the Net*, 46 (2007).

[21] *TW*, p. 3; *BL*, i. pp. 180-82; *CL*, i. p. 179; *TW*, pp. xxxii-xxxv; Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 155-56.

[22] Michael T. Davis, '"I Can Bear Punishment": Daniel Isaac Eaton, Radical Culture and the Rule of Law, 1793-1812', in *Crime, Punishment, and Reform in Europe*, ed. Louis A. Knafla (Westport: Praeger, 2003), pp. 90-91.

[23] *TW*, pp. 142-45; John Edwards, *Letters to the British Nation*, 4 vols (London: J. Thompson, 1791-92), iv. p. 70.

[24] *CL*, i. p. 178; Robin Whittaker, 'Tourist, tradesman—or troublemaker? Coleridge's visit to Worcester, 1796', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 21 (2003): p. 52.

Why then, it might be enquired, set the implication up at all? Coleridge's consciously provocative insinuation may be understood as an implicit challenge to traditional fault lines within his readership. After neutralising an implication that threatens to divide it, he opens up space for gentler ridicule in which all sections of his readership might share. The passage ends with a ribald joke at the expense of the 'gentlemen of Lancashire and Cheshire' who, though they claim to fight battles, in fact 'fight only their cocks'.[26] Coleridge pokes fun at these gentlemen, who were well-known for their taste for cockfighting, referencing a rivalry specific enough that it would be unlikely to cause widespread offence amongst his readers.[27] This progression, from the unfulfilled contentiousness of a satirical attack on the King, to the light-hearted lampooning of individuals, achieves the same effect as the Archdeacon remark but by different means. Rather than disguising his implied joke such that an appreciation of it requires careful re-perusal, Coleridge instead starts out with a potentially offensive implication, and subsequently forces his reader to reconsider their presumption when the true target (in this case the implied cowardice of these gentlemen, and by extension perhaps the aristocracy in general) is revealed. In both instances Coleridge deliberately obscures his exact position on the matter in hand in service of a more fundamental goal: compelling his readers to shed their partiality and reconsider the initial assumptions provoked in them by the motif.

Though gentler and more intimate in tone, *The Watchman*'s approach to satire thus represents a natural continuation of many of the concerns Coleridge had begun to develop about satirical writing. By borrowing and subverting the satirical techniques of his contemporaries, he urges readers to consider the biases and falsehoods inherent to satire, rather than simply being swept up in the prejudices of the crowd. As the next section will demonstrate, this approach to satire governed not only his response to individual satirical tropes and motifs, but the overarching structure and purpose of *The Watchman* itself.

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[25] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), pp. 52-53.

[26] *TW*, p. 276.

[27] *Cheshire including Chester*, eds. Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. lxxvii.

2.2

Though Coleridge does deflate and subvert readers' expectations of biting satirical allegories, *The Watchman*'s jibes and 'sarcasms' are not always as general and harmless as the relatively mild mockery of the gentlemen of Lancashire and Cheshire in 'War: A New Mode Recommended'. Often, his satire is rather more controversial, appearing directly to implicate governments and individuals with surprising severity. Where such material is present, however, the ground has always been carefully prepared to encourage reflection (as opposed to immediate agreement or disagreement). Much as he had done in, for instance, *An Answer to "A Letter to Edward Long Fox, M. D"*, Coleridge adopts what might be described as a Horatian effort both to disguise the true target of his attack, and to call into question the reliability of himself as a satirist. The result is a uniquely intertextual and ambivalent form of satire that permeates the periodical as a whole.

It is within the pages of *The Watchman*, for example, that Coleridge begins to formulate some of his earliest satirical attacks upon revolutionary France, although the force of these attacks is softened for the reader by careful contextualisation. On the 11th and 12th of April several of the London newspapers, including *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle*, printed news of a series of communications that had been transmitted during the preceding month between François Barthelemy, French minister representative in Switzerland, and William Wickham, the British ambassador to Switzerland.[1] These displayed evidence of the British government broaching the subject of a peace treaty, and receiving a diplomatic, though unequivocal, dismissal from the Directory of the French Republic. It was not until the eighth issue of *The Watchman*, printed on 19 April 1796, that Coleridge had the opportunity publicly to reflect on this news, condemning the French decision in his ‘Remonstrance: To the French Legislators’. For Björn Bosserhoff this essay in particular, along with Coleridge’s subsequent criticisms of French military aggression, displays the earliest stages of his growing ‘impatience with French megalomania’, and certainly his criticism of the ‘abject court-craft’ of French politicians highlights something of an underlying shift in his perception of French politics.[2]

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[1] 'Advertisements and Notices.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 12 Apr. 1796, p. 4. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000809855/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=2354d862. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; 'Note transmitted to M. Barthelemi. by Mr. Wickham, March 8, 1796.' *The Times* [London], 11 Apr. 1796, p. 2. The Times Digital Archive, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/CS16914059/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=bc86111a. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; *TW*, p. 235.

In and of itself such a critique, though potentially contentious, would not necessarily put off those amongst his readership who continued to sympathise with the actions of the French state. Rather than denouncing it, Coleridge concludes by politely ‘adjur[ing] you [the French legislators] to consider, that misused success is soon followed by adversity’, tempering his earlier criticisms with measured advice.[3] His commentary, however, does not end with the close of the ‘Remonstrance’. Nicholas Roe has shown how Coleridge, in putting *The Watchman* together, sought to ‘[draw] a narrative from seemingly miscellaneous contributions’, developing themes and ideas within the structure of each issue.[4] In the case of the eighth issue this mode of communication is used to create a form of intertextual satire, with Coleridge’s subsequent arrangement of articles revealing continued reflection on the Wickham-Barthelemy correspondence, though at first the ordering seems almost arbitrary. Directly after his editorial Coleridge inserts a seemingly unrelated submission from a reader signing himself as ‘Medicus’ (and whom, in his annotations to the copy now held in the British Library, Coleridge identifies as Thomas Beddoes).[5] It is an account drawn from Samuel Bardsley’s ‘Miscellaneous Observations on Canine and Spontaneous Hydrophobia’, detailing the story of the illness of a weaver named John Lindsay.[6] On the face of it this diversion into medical anecdote appears unrelated to the preceding politics, especially given the ubiquity of such dramatic shifts in subject matter and tone throughout *The Watchman*. Upon closer inspection, however, certain resemblances emerge between the account and the 'Remonstrance'.

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[2] Björn Bosserhoff, *Radical Contra-Diction: Coleridge, Revolution, Apostasy* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p. 102.

[3] *TW*, p. 273.

[4] Nicholas Roe, ‘Coleridge’s Watchman Tour’, *Coleridge Bulletin*, 21 (2003): p. 41.

[5] S. T. Coleridge, *The Watchman* (Bristol: S. T. Coleridge, 1796). British Library: Ashley 2408.

[6] Samuel Bardsley, ‘Miscellaneous Observations on Canine and Spontaneous Hydrophobia: to Which is Prefixed, the History of a Case of Hydrophobia Occurring Twelve Years after the Bite of a Supposed Mad Dog’, in *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester*, 5 vols (Manchester: C. Wheeler, 1793), iv. pp. 431-88.

Having worked tirelessly, in what is described as a 'paroxysm of rage and tenderness', Lindsay is said to have collapsed into a deep sleep. From this sleep he awoke complaining of 'giddiness and confusion in his head', before descending into increasingly severe 'symptoms of hydrophobia', which he attributes to his having been bitten by a 'supposed mad dog' twelve years earlier. The full spectacle of these symptoms is described by Medicus in detail:

> He complained of much uneasiness at the light of a candle, that was burning in the room. On evacuating his urine, he was obliged to turn aside his head from the vessel, as he could not bear the sight of the fluid without great uneasiness. [...] He eagerly asked, if I had not heard howlings and scratchings? On being answered in the negative, he suddenly threw himself upon his knees, extending his arms in a defensive posture, and forcibly throwing back his head and body. The muscles of the face were agitated by various spasmodic contortions;—his eye balls glared, and seemed ready to start from their sockets.[7]

Coming as it does directly after Coleridge's account of the madness of French legislators, the comparison to events over the channel is unmistakable. An 'abject' man, with a desire to improve the lives of those in his care, is overcome by a violent disease and driven mad, to the point of exhibiting unwarranted aggression towards those around him. As in the case of the Archdeacon allegory, Coleridge's veiled but nevertheless damning ridicule of the French relies upon readerly attentiveness; the joke depends upon perceiving the similarity in the two 'paroxysms' (a term used in both articles), and recognising the reduction of French politics to the level of bodily dysfunction. Coleridge, in this cautious manner, satirises French legislators' irrationality far more forcefully than in any work he had previously published.

In order to appreciate this intertextual mockery, however, one must first have digested the more tentative argument that precedes it. The format of Coleridge's ridicule thus inherently primes the reader to consider the matter from his perspective, rather than speaking to extant prejudices on the subject. It is an example which lends weight to Tim Fulford's contention that, in producing *The Watchman*, Coleridge

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[7] *TW*, pp. 274-75.

'attempts to pass off with jokes serious material which he suspected might be unpopular'.[8] Fulford's comment suggests that Coleridge's wit represents a defence mechanism that distances him from potentially divisive opinions. Yet as well as distancing him, this very defensiveness creates the ideal conditions for the reception of those opinions. His satirical jibes are able to pass off such views because they intrinsically facilitate deeper reflection upon them. The intertextuality of this ridicule (which is to say its reliance upon the preceding article) prompts readers to work out the truth of his comparison for themselves.

Perhaps the most infamous joke in *The Watchman*, however, seems quite starkly to contradict the view that his satire is carefully constructed to prompt reflection. As discussed in Chapter One, the quotation from Isaiah with which Coleridge opens the second issue's 'Essay on Fasts', '*Wherefore my Bowels shall sound like an Harp*', represents a particularly notorious instance of the coarser side to Coleridge's wit. The epigraph wittily reinforces one of the key arguments of the essay itself, which takes aim at 'pious Churchm[e]n' who read the Bible too literally and consequently force harmful fasts on a suffering population.[9] To evidence his point, Coleridge cites 'the coincidence of number in the days' between Christ's fast in the desert and the forty-day fasts 'practiced with extreme rigour by the ancient [pre-Christian] priests'. Suggesting that the gospels are merely borrowing from older traditions, Coleridge argues that it is ridiculous to extrapolate from their evidence in order to impose fasts in the modern day. The argument was not an uncommon one amongst dissenters, with many dissenting ministers, as well as publishers like Richard 'Citizen' Lee, having similarly spoken out against national fasts.[10] In this context, Coleridge's quotation from Isaiah reads as yet another attempt to mock the 'pious' churchmen of the Established Church, tauntingly illustrating (for the benefit of a largely dissenting readership) the ridiculous conclusions to which overly simplistic biblical hermeneutics can lead.

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[8] Tim Fulford, *Coleridge's Figurative Language* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 6-7.

[9] *TW*, i. pp. 51-53.

[10] Robert Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 49; Barrell '"An Entire Change of Performances?" The Politicisation of Theatre and the Theatricalisation of Politics in the mid 1790s', *Lumen*, 17 (1998): p. 25.

Many of Coleridge's readers did not, however, agree. The epigraph caused considerable offence amongst more reverent readers, losing him 'near five hundred of my subscribers at one blow', as he later put it in *Biographia Literaria*.[11] Perhaps influenced by the regret Coleridge voices here at this 'most censurable' joke, critical readings often treat the epigraph as a thoughtlessly brash misjudgement, with H. D. Traill, for instance, associating it with a 'delightful *naïveté*' on Coleridge's part.[12] It is certainly a puzzling and seemingly rash inclusion, especially given how well Coleridge knew his readership after having quite literally lived amongst them during his northern tour.

There is, however, evidence to suggest that Coleridge deliberately sought to cause at least some offence with this joke, and that its inclusion is in fact more calculated than Traill acknowledges. Aside from the fact that Coleridge would go on to condemn the irreligious tone of the *Monthly Magazine* later that year (a fact which, though it suggests *The Watchman*'s puerility was intentionally included to serve an ulterior purpose, could simply be put down to Coleridgean inconsistency), the offending material itself reveals links with similar and demonstrably offensive texts.[13] The 'Essay on Fasts' does not represent the first use of the quotation in a political essay: four years beforehand, in 1792, the Reverend William Woolley had published *The Benefit of Starving; or The Advantages of Hunger, Cold, and Nakedness*, which also uses Isaiah 16: 11 as an epigraph.[14] Woolley's essay, which similarly condemns fasting and other forms of government-induced famine (war being one of his primary targets), was not received well, with Woolley's later letters detailing that he had been prevailed upon to apologise for it.[15] This public distaste with Woolley's writing would have been still more apparent after his trial in 1794, in which he was charged with libelling one Sir Richard Hill, and found his 'vulgar wit' further condemned.[16] Whether Coleridge, who had a keen interest in contemporary trials, was aware of Woolley or not, the episode reveals a clear precedent for the offensiveness of such jovial irreverence.[17]

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[11] *TW*, 51; Kooy, p. 153; *BL*, i. p. 184.
[12] H. D. Traill, *English Men of Letters: Coleridge* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1925), p. 35.
[13] *CL*, i. p. 268.
[14] William Wooley, *The Benefit of Starving: or The Advantages of Hunger, Cold, and Nakedness* (London: G. Terry, 1792).
[15] Richard Hill, *A Detection of Gross Falshood, and a Display of Black Ingratitude; being an Answer to a Pamphlet Lately Published by some Evil-Minded Person, under the Name of Revd. William Woolley* (London: J. Stockdale, 1794), p. 27.

Yet in order to understand why Coleridge might have intended to follow, knowingly or otherwise, in these footsteps, it is necessary to examine exactly how he goes about it. The epigraph does not constitute the only time Coleridge quotes from Isaiah, and in fact the essay concludes with two further passages from the book. The first of these is particularly curious:

> When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: *your hands are full of blood!* (*TW*, 55)

From the text alone, removed from its original context, it is possible to deduce that the line does not refer to fasting (a time when animals specifically do not need to be slaughtered). Instead, the passage refers to sacrifices and feast days, which are explicitly condemned in the prophet's divine proclamation that 'Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth.'[18] When the original context is traced, it becomes apparent that the quotation in fact contradicts one of the essay's core arguments, that 'an annual *Feast* in the nature of things would have stimulated the gratitude of posterity much more effectually,' suggesting that it would be better to feed than starve the poor (*TW*, 52). Coleridge could have expected his largely religious dissenting readership to pick up on this inconsistency, suggesting that his intention is more complicated than the similarities with Woolley might initially indicate.[19]

Coleridge appears to be making himself, or his authorial persona, the butt of the joke. His concluding misapplication of Isaiah, seen in this light, mirrors his opening epigraph's satirical misinterpretation of the term ‘bowels’ (which in Isaiah refers simply to the bowels as the source of compassion and mercy).[20] This impression of authorial imprecision is compounded by the misleading reference given for the closing quotation, which solely directs the reader to ‘Isaiah ch. lviii’, despite the fact that the misapplied initial passage is in fact from Isaiah 1: 15. To do so in a passage that everywhere draws attention to linguistic and interpretative inaccuracy, for instance in the common pronunciation of ‘the new Form of Prayer’ (‘or, as the women bawl it about the streets, the new *former* prayer – bye the bye, no *unmeaning* blunder’), is particularly revealing.[21] Coleridge, who of course knew his Bible, is enticing his reader to think otherwise, performing an ignorance and impudence in his approach to it.

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[16] *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal, Enlarged*, 108 vols (London: A. and R. Spottiswoode, 1790-1825), xvi. p. 236.

[17] Accounts of several were printed in *The Watchman*. See for instance *TW*, pp. 127-30, 143-45.

[18] Isaiah 1: 14. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, eds. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 765.

[19] Felicity James discusses Coleridge's dissenting readership in: Felicity James, 'Writing in Dissent: Coleridge and the Poetry of the *Monthly Magazine*', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 3 (2006), 4; see also Stuart Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism: Political Rhetoric, 1770-1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 101.

Felicity James’ observations about *The Watchman* are useful in decoding this pretence. Writing about his approach to editing the periodical, James contends that Coleridge is negotiating an ‘individual role within the larger context of the periodical, [...] struggling to articulate his own social stance, to work out a way between retreat and engagement’.[22] This concept of negotiation may similarly be applied to the authorial performance of the ‘Essay on Fasts’, which begins to appear more layered than a first glance might display. In making his authorial persona somewhat laughable with his inappropriate and ill-advisedly satirical biblical quotations, Coleridge steps back slightly from his own convictions, giving up room into which the reader may advance with critical engagement. David V. Erdman makes a similar claim with regard to his journalism later in the decade, asserting Coleridge’s ‘ability to see the romantic extravagance of his own positive assertions’.[23] Aware of the errors and biases in his writing in *The Watchman*, Coleridge appears deliberately to flag up his own extravagance here for the consideration of the reader.

By laying bare his mistakes in this way, he negotiates, to use James’ term, between arguing his case, and allowing the reader space for independent critical response. Such an approach allows him to prompt reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of his argument, and to give the impression that the view he expresses requires further consideration. He may even have hoped that readers might send in their responses, providing entertaining material for future issues, and replicating the audience engagement evident in the *Monthly Magazine* (which often featured readers' corrections and retorts, and which Coleridge explicitly sought to rival).[24] Though such a conjecture is purely speculative, it gestures towards the nature of his underlying intentions for the 'Essay on Fasts' and *The Watchman* as a whole. By offending some with his satire, and in the process revealing uncharacteristically glaring weaknesses in his argument, Coleridge calls the reader to attention, demanding textual scrutiny.

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[20] Albert Barnes, *Notes: Critical, Explanatory, and Practical, on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 3 vols (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1840), i. p. 512.
[21] *TW*, p. 53.
[22] James, ‘Writing in Dissent’, p. 2.
[23] S. T. Coleridge, *Essays on his Times*, ed. David V. Erdman, 3 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 3. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), i. p. lxvi. Hereafter cited as *EOT*.

This is not to say that Coleridge intended to risk losing subscribers: if he is guilty of anything it must be of misjudging the degree, not the nature, of his readers' sensitivity. Nor is it to say that he is in fact critical of fast days, an institution against which he also rails in *Conciones ad Populum*.[25] Instead, by mockingly undermining his own position, Coleridge fundamentally spotlights the inherent prejudice of the satirist, placing an emphasis on the inescapability of bias that serves his wider ambitions for *The Watchman*. From the outset, in the first issue's 'Introductory Essay,' Coleridge draws attention to this bias, asserting that '[i]t would be absurd to promise [...] neutrality in the political Essays', and encouraging his reader to recognise (and critically engage with) this inherent lack of neutrality. The 'very act of dissenting from established opinions,' he states, 'must generate habits precursive to the love of freedom. Man begins to be free when he begins to examine'.[26] Coleridge's subversion of himself, as a communicator and disseminator of formulated opinions, eliminates the final barrier to that aim: one cannot ask for critical engagement and then impel a reader blindly to accept one's views. Coleridge did object to fast days (as his earlier writings make plain), but by satirically undermining his own speaking voice, much as Horace had done, he is able to promote *The Watchman*'s broader effort to encourage critical thought.

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[24] See for instance: 'To the Editor', *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, 48 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1796-1819), i. p. 18; *TW*, p. 374.
[25] *Lects 1795*, pp. 65-66.
[26] *TW*, p. 13.

This effort may be perceived in satirical sections throughout the periodical. In a 'Copy of a Handbill' printed in the first issue, for example, Coleridge appears to prompt a similar recognition of his flaws as author and editor. Almost identical to a similar piece published in the *Morning Post* two weeks earlier, this mock handbill announces that

> the Right Honourable WILLIAM PITT, Chancellor of his Majesty's Exchequer, did, on the night of Monday last, and on or about the hour of six o'clock, utter, in his place in the House of Commons, certain sentences, or phases, containing several assurances, denials, promises, retractions, persuasions, explanations, hints, insinuations, and intimations, and expressing much hope, fear, joy, sorrow, confidence, and doubt upon the subject of Peace.[27]

The joke was common enough at the time. Known for the vague and circumlocutory language with which he dodged questions and obfuscated facts in court and in Parliament, Pitt was frequently mocked both by the anti-ministerial press and by the opposition itself. Coleridge had earlier referred to this particular line of attack in *Conciones ad Populum*, describing his 'Harangues' as 'Mystery concealing Meanness', and recommending readers take them with a pinch of salt.[28] As well as humorously suggesting that the piece is a replication of a genuine handbill, Coleridge's acknowledgement in the title that it is a 'Copy' also points towards the unoriginality of its borrowed parodic attack. In so doing it nods towards a self-critique Coleridge would make more strongly in a letter to John Edwards later that month, in which he jokingly affirms that he is but a 'Re-retailer of retailed Scurrility, keeper of [an] Asylum for old, poor, and decayed Jokes'.[29] Emphasising that such material is often copied or drawn from elsewhere, Coleridge highlights an unimaginative quality to his satire.

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[27] 'One Thousand Pounds Reward.', *Morning Post* [London], 18 Feb. 1796, p. 2. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000971413/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=6266fcfa. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; *TW*, p. 47.

[28] See *TW*, p. 47.

[29] *CL*, i. p. 192.

Yet he does not copy the original parodic handbill verbatim. The *Morning Post* version had concluded by offering a

> REWARD of *One Thousand Pounds* to any person or persons who shall within the space of one week from the date hereof make FULL DISCOVERY whether the said WILLIAM PITT gave most reason to hope for Peace, or to dread for the Continuance of the War [...].
> THE BULLS AND THE BEARS
> *Stock Exchange, Feb. 17, 1796.*[30]

Coleridge's concluding appeal is different. Rather than inviting responses to a simple fictional address, he adds an additional layer to the joke, promising

> to any person who shall restore the said lost meaning, or shall illustrate, simplify, and explain the said meaning, the sum of FIVE THOUSAND POUNDS, to be paid on the first day of *April* next, at the office of JOHN BULL, Esq. PAY-ALL and FIGHT-ALL to the several High contracting Powers engaged in the present *just* and *necessary* War!
> Done at the Office of Mr JOHN BULL'S Chief Decypherer, Turnagain-lane, Circumbendibus-street, Obscurity-square, February 18, 1796.[31]

As well as increasing the amount offered, Coleridge sees in the address an opportunity for a further joke, echoing, in its various reiterated connotations of vagueness, the central accusation of obscurity that the handbill itself levels at Pitt.

However, by attributing these to himself as 'JOHN BULL's Chief Decypherer', the effect is somewhat different from that of the *Morning Post* version. Firstly, where the original does not give a name at all ('THE BULLS AND THE BEARS' suggesting some form of establishment where the letters might be addressed), the choice of persona for Coleridge's handbill emphasises its own ignorance, highlighting the fact that even he, a supposed 'Decypherer', cannot make head or tail of Pitt's speech. Secondly, by so emphatically associating himself with 'Obscurity' in his unnecessarily lengthy address, Coleridge's persona unexpectedly aligns his own language with the very criticism he had made of Pitt: circumlocution. This association reflects other similar instances in the handbill, such as the request for correspondents to ‘illustrate, simplify, and explain’ the aforementioned speech: three words which, in their similar meanings, echo Pitt’s unnecessarily verbose and vapid language. The implication both of this association and of the overlong address reflects the way in which Coleridge appears to undermine his own speaking voice in the ‘Essay on Fasts’. Just as he had encouraged readers of that essay to ‘[dissent] from established opinions’, so here he both promotes personal engagement (humorously asking for suggestions from the reader) and draws attention to the flaws of his own speaking voice. A seemingly uninventive borrowing of a well-worn joke thus becomes another opportunity to advocate a greater engagement with the text.

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[30] 'One Thousand Pounds Reward.' p. 2.
[31] *TW*, p. 48.

Humour, Coleridge instinctively recognised, is the perfect tool with which to prompt this sort of engagement. Allowing for a light-hearted remove from contentious issues, it is able to encourage (through almost teasing errors and ambivalences) critical engagement. In the ‘Essay on Fasts’ (as, in a different way, in the ‘Copy of a Handbill’) Coleridge plays the fool, whose attempts to satirise and critique others in fact reveal, on closer inspection, playful ambiguities and inconsistencies that force re-perusal and reconsideration. In so doing, he fulfils the implied self-criticism intimated in the periodical’s title, one that links his own role as a ‘faithful watchman’ with a running eighteenth-century joke about the ineffectiveness of watchmen. In previous decades newspapers had frequently carried accounts of idle and ineffective watchmen, falling asleep at their posts or failing to apprehend criminals, to the extent that they became something of a byword for ineptitude in popular culture (with one frequently reprinted 1790s handbill, for instance, detailing the story of a theft, in response to which the summoned watchman merely returns to his box and ‘fall[s] fast asleep’).[32] For Coleridge too, in another of his few references to watchmen, these qualities are insinuated: in ‘To the Nightingale’ he describes

> the drowsy cry of Watchmen

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[32] Richard M. Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 135. For a contemporary instance Coleridge may have read see *Morning Post* [London], 25 Feb. 1795, p. 3. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000966666/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=fd830559. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; ‘The watchman’, no. 1873,0712.855, www.britishmuseum.org/collection. British Museum. Online. Accessed 19 Nov. 2017.

> (Those hoarse unfeather'd Nightingales of TIME!)[33]

By intimating these connotations of 'unfeather'd' drowsiness (which recall Peter Pindar's description of the 'drowsy watchman' in the satirical 'Tears of St. Margaret') in the title of *The Watchman*, Coleridge encourages the reader to see a somewhat risible character lurking beneath his initial suggestion of an 'implacable guardian of true values,' as Seamus Perry puts it.[34] He prompts his readers, before a word of the periodical itself is read, to be on their guard, for (like the watchman he impersonates) he will not necessarily protect them from harm. As he does in the 'Essay on Fasts,' Coleridge deliberately suggests that his is a persona not to be taken entirely seriously: he encourages the reader, in a manner that coheres with *The Watchman*'s stated objectives, to question and examine his unavoidable 'bias' in order to achieve true intellectual security.[35]

The Watchman, as such, is a work which everywhere reveals Coleridge's essential awareness of his own prejudice, employing a jocular impulse towards self-satire in order to highlight that *The Watchman*, like any piece of writing, cannot promise absolute 'neutrality'.[36] Though he expresses and makes a case for certain views, he also draws attention, in this way, to the inescapable bias within them, inducing his reader not to accept his arguments blindly (as the 'herd[s]' in taverns do).[37] This strategy reveals the governing principle behind Coleridge's manipulation of satirical witticisms and jibes in *The Watchman*: namely, a fundamental desire to encourage more attentive and analytical reading practices. In so doing, he puts into practice the wryly ambivalent Horatian attitude to satire that he had begun to develop in his 1795 political writing, and particularly the *Answer to "A Letter to Edward Long Fox, M. D"*. Whether by forcing re-perusal of cited texts with ambiguously humorous references, by intimating jokes only to negate their significance, or, ultimately, by light-heartedly undermining his own authorial voice, Coleridge urges his reader both to scrutinise and reassess his satirical attacks, and to approach not only his work but indeed everything they read with a greater degree of critical awareness. Whilst he affirms that *The Watchman*, like its namesake, may proclaim the time (or the 'State of the Political Atmosphere'), he simultaneously suggests that it should not be relied upon wholly to replace the vigilance of the reader.[38] 'Men always serve the cause of freedom by *thinking*,' Coleridge asserts in the 'Introductory Essay,' and *The Watchman*'s satire, with its multifaceted and often misleading wit, consistently necessitates that act.[39]

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[33] *Poems*, i. p. 227.

[34] Peter Pindar, 'The Tears of St. Margaret.' *Lloyd's Evening Post* [London], 13 Aug. 1792, p. 4. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000533298/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=e4639e44. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; Seamus Perry, 'Coleridge's Names', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 11 (1998): p. 43.

[35] *TW*, p. 14.

[36] *TW*, p. 14.

[37] *TW*, p. 98.

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[38] *TW*, p. 6.
[39] *TW*, p. 13.

Chapter Three: Recluse

Coleridge did not abandon *The Watchman* as a direct result of his having scared off ‘near five hundred of my subscribers at one blow’, although this probably did not help matters.[1] The true cause most likely lay in a combination of contributing factors. On a practical level, perhaps the most important of these was that it was not bringing in enough money. Because his London distributor was reluctant to forward the profits to him, each issue was costing Coleridge more than he had anticipated, regardless of the success of the periodical itself.[2] Writing to Cottle in February 1796, he reveals the extent of his financial worries, fearing ‘Poverty perhaps, and the thin faces of them that want bread looking up to me!’.[3] The situation undoubtedly put a considerable amount of pressure on him to move on to more profitable ventures.

Yet *The Watchman* also appears to some extent to have failed on its own terms. With an audience made up both of dissenters and secular radicals as far apart as Sheffield and Bristol, it was difficult for Coleridge, even within the parameters of a miscellaneous publication, to satisfy all sections of his readership simultaneously. Whilst his careful and calculated satire suggests an attempt to bridge and overcome these divides, he could not account for the fundamental differences in interest between his readers. The result was that, despite Coleridge having specifically courted the subscriptions for instance of dissenters on his northern tour, the periodical failed significantly to engage with these readers: as Nicholas Roe puts it, ‘there is actually remarkably little in *The Watchman* that addressed dissenting issues and causes’.[4] Rather than leaving suddenly in offence at the periodical’s jokes, such readers may simply have slowly lost interest.

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[1] *BL*, i. p. 184.

[2] John Worthen, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 7.

[3] *CL*, i. p. 185.

[4] Roe, ‘Coleridge’s Watchman Tour’, p. 44.

Coleridge was well aware of this problem at the time and stressed in his letters the difficulties he faced in keeping all his readers entertained at once. ‘I feel the perplexities of my undertaking increase daily’, he informs Poole;

> In London, & Bristol the Watchman is read for it’s original matter, & the News & Debates barely tolerated: the people [at] Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, &c take [it only] as a Newspaper, & regard the Essays & Poems [as int]ruders unwished for & unwelcome. In short, a Subscriber instead of regarding himself as a point in the circumference entitled to some one diverging ray, considers me as the circumference & himself as the Centre to which *all* the rays ought to converge.[5]

The closing metaphor is a revealing one. Having commenced the project believing that ‘the truth may make us free!’, he left it realising that the gravitational pull of readers’ own interests and prejudices was too strong for such an ambition to succeed. Given that his satire had been predicated upon challenging prejudice and encouraging fresh independent thought, this realisation was crushing.

It is not surprising, in the wake of this growing realisation, that Coleridge should declare that ‘I have [...] snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition’.[6] Retiring to Nether Stowey, his focus turned to poetry, and specifically to his forthcoming volume *Poems*, published later in 1796. Though this was not the first time he had thought of himself as retreating from public life (as his ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ suggest), it was nevertheless a significant shift.[7] For Deirdre Coleman, the beginnings of the retreat are visible from as early as the last issues of *The Watchman*, from which ‘Coleridge’s highly personalised authorial presence begins to disappear’.[8] This retreat reaches its crisis in May, when, having terminated *The Watchman*, Coleridge proclaims that circumstances have ‘depressed me beneath the *writing-point* in the thermometer of mind’.[9] Such comments reveal a growing despondency regarding his public political role, laying the ground for an increasing turn inwards towards public writing of a more introspective and (at least on the face of it) non-political nature.[10]

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[5] *CL*. i. p. 202.

[6] *CL*, i. p. 240.

[7] *Poems*, i. p. 260.

[8] Deirdre Coleman, ‘The Journalist’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 136.

[9] *CL*, i. p. 212.

This shift has significant consequences for Coleridge's satirical writing. Despite having seen his efforts in *The Watchman* fail and retreating from his former ambition to 'make us free!', he does continue to engage with and write satire. His motivations and intentions for doing so, however, noticeably transform. 1797's 'The Raven', discussed in the first section of this chapter, appears on the face of it to address the problems with radical satire that Coleridge had discerned in his previous writing. Although his perception of his public role had changed, it seems that his views on this front, as on many others of a political nature (for the time being), had not.[11] Rather than attempting to change readers' minds on the subject, however, 'The Raven' has a less obvious aim. Unlike *The Watchman*'s outward-facing satire, which is focused on challenging prejudice, the poem appears more an inward and personal expression of frustration about society's failings.

The same can be said of the three sonnets Coleridge published under the Higginbottom pseudonym, which constitute one of the few examples of satire written in the year or so following his professed decision to '[snap] my squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition'. Written in 1797, several months after 'The Raven', these sonnets similarly depart from the subtle and calculated humour of his earlier satire. Their blunt and personal mockery of Coleridge's and his friends' verse suggests not only a growing movement away from public political satire, but also an increasing comfort with what he had previously held to be the morally harmful aspects of ridicule and satirical denunciation. This comfort, if it is indeed what Coleridge felt, goes some way towards explaining the satire he would produce for Daniel Stuart at the *Morning Post* the following year (discussed in Part Two), which in its apparent vindictiveness represents a considerable shift from his earlier scepticism about satire.

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[10] The fact that, in writing *Osorio* at this time, he sought to produce work for a venue in which overt political comment was impossible (the patent theatre at Drury Lane) is perhaps indicative of a broader attempt to reconfigure his public role away from that of the political preacher of 1795. *CL*, i. p. 316.

[11] His sermons in early 1798 suggest that no moderation of his political opinions had taken place either. See Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 236-37.

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After the discontinuation of *The Watchman* in May 1796, Coleridge's poetry, both published and unpublished, displays a continued interest in satire. In 'The Raven', composed either later that year or in early 1797, Coleridge's reflection upon contemporary satirical tropes and genres is particularly plain.[1] Yet whilst the poem is, on the face of it, explicitly framed within a contemporary satirical context, its relationship to this context is not one of straightforward emulation. As he had in *The Watchman*, Coleridge appropriates motifs from contemporary political rhetoric and satirical writing in order to manipulate them for his own purposes. However, where *The Watchman* addressed the particular concerns of a particular audience (however internally disunited), the focus of 'The Raven' is harder to pin down. Although it is framed in the context of radical satire and parodic political eclogue, the true purpose of Coleridge's poem is not immediately discernible. In order to investigate Coleridge's intentions for the piece, this section places it in the broader context not only of contemporary satire, but also of Coleridge's changing attitude to British society in the later 1790s. It argues that, although 'The Raven' masquerades in the guise of contemporary satirical writing, it in fact reveals a fundamental critique of popular literary taste.

Both the poem's subject matter, and the way in which that subject matter is presented, resemble from the outset the satirical animal fables that littered the 1790s press.[2] The *Morning Chronicle*, for instance, had published a poem entitled 'The Magpie—A Fable' in August 1794 (a year when Coleridge was himself publishing much of his poetry within its pages).[3] The piece recounts how a 'Magpie, of suspicious breed', 'scorning' the crude 'ends of verse' sung by the other birds, 'resolv'd to quit his friendly school' in order to meet a 'Parrot Minister' who bribes him to spread 'scandal' and 'throw his dirt' at his own kind.[4] The poem has an unambiguous topical relevance, made explicit in its overtly political references to the 'Minister' and his 'House' (where fellow birds shout 'Aye, or No!'), and by these hints the reader is guided towards the butt of the satire: the government's recruitment of informers and spies to infiltrate, report on, and disrupt radical communities.[5] Thelwall's lectures had frequently been interrupted by rowdy intruders whom he accused of being in the pay of the ministry, whilst the evidence gathered (and in some cases concocted) by spies had been used in the prosecutions of the 1793 Edinburgh Treason Trials, and would be used extensively again in the Treason Trials in London in 1794.[6] 'The Magpie' clearly positions itself within this fraught political climate, facilitating a political interpretation of the satirical fable it presents.

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[1] *Poems*, i. p. 316.

[2] Damian Walford Davies, 'Capital Crimes: John Thelwall, "Gallucide" and Psychobiography', *Romanticism*, 18 (2012): pp. 55-56.

[3] *Morning Chronicle*, 1 Aug. 1794 [7 Feb. 2020]; 'To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle' and 'Sonnets on Eminent Characters', for instance. *Poems*, i. p. 155-169.

Coleridge's 'Raven' at first appears broadly to follow in this mould, with the key points of its plot cohering substantially with 'The Magpie'. Disapproving of the 'large company' alongside which it starts the poem (this time not of birds but swine), the raven flies away and ultimately, like the magpie (though not sharing the same direct responsibility), takes pleasure in harm suffered by others.[7] Whether or not Coleridge knew the poem and consciously intended to set up this coherence, the conspicuous similarities between the two poems reveal much about the way in which Coleridge appears to have wanted his poem to be read. Like 'The Magpie', Coleridge's raven shows a clear disdain for the crude behaviour of the crowd it observes ('lik[ing] not such folly'), and as with 'The Magpie' there are prominent clues as to how to interpret the wider significance of this disdain.[8] Foremost amongst these is the reference to 'Swine', which, in the wake of Burke's 'strikingly provocative' (as Michael Scrivener puts it) description of the population as a 'swinish multitude' in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, positions the poem as a comment on contemporary politics.[9] Periodicals like *Pig's Meat* and *Politics for the People*, which had published Thelwall's 'King Chaunticlere' (perhaps the most notorious radical animal fable, discussed in the previous chapter), were of course replete with jokes and allegories involving pigs.[10] Coleridge's inclusion of this ubiquitous image seems to evoke an immediate kinship with such material, overtly inviting the reader (as the author of 'The Magpie' does) to read the poem as a political allegory, one in which the swine, as they do in the satire of Coleridge's contemporaries, represent some aspect of the British people (or an attempt to mock certain politicians' dismissive perception of them).

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[4] 'The Magpie—A Fable.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 1 Aug. 1794, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000802075/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=61f7e9e1. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[5] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 211, 453.

[6] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 224.

[7] *Poems*, i. pp. 318-320.

[8] *Poems*, i. p. 318.

It is tempting, on the basis of such references, to interpret a cohesive allegorical significance within the poem as a whole. For Carl Woodring, the poem's suggestively symbolic images (alongside Coleridge's later comments on these images), provide the basis for an overarching political reading.[11] When Coleridge revised the poem for inclusion in *Sibylline Leaves*, he appended a closing couplet that softened the original version's bitter conclusion that 'REVENGE WAS SWEET', reminding readers that

> We must not think so; but forget and forgive,
> And what Heaven gives life, we'll still let it live.[12]

Commenting on this change in a manuscript note, however, Coleridge regrets its necessity, criticising the contemporary 'alarm concerning Christian morality, that will not permit even a Raven to be a Raven, nor a Fox a Fox'.[13] Upon this comment Woodring builds his reading. 'If we take the Raven as C. J. Fox', he writes, 'we can make into Burke the Woodman "in leathern guise"', and thus the oak (cut down by the Woodman) in turn 'represents most narrowly the Whig party', having been split by Burke's 'cleavage from the Whigs'.[14] In this way, Woodring constructs a reasoned overarching allegory from key elements singled out from the poem.

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[9] Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), p. 93; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.79.

[10] *Pigs' Meat: or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude* (London: T. Spence, 1795); *Politics for the People*; Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 208.

[11] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, pp. 135-36.

[12] *Poems*, i. p. 320; S. T. Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems* (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), p. viii.

[13] See *CPW*, i. p. 171.

In order to assemble this thesis, however, he necessarily overlooks details that appear to conflict with, or complicate, his reasoning. If the oak tree represents the Whig party, threatened by Burke the woodcutter, why does Coleridge open with a description of another oak tree being threatened ('crunch'd') by swine? If we follow Woodring's logic, the scene suggests that the 'swinish multitude' present a danger to the Whig party comparable to that posed by Burke. To evade this conclusion, Woodring instead suggests that the first oak 'might [represent] the hollow oaks of the Navy, with which Duncan had won the then glorious battle of Camperdown', before downplaying the importance of this complicating evidence by stressing that the critical part of the poem lies elsewhere: 'Coleridge's fable', he writes, 'centers on the acorn that grew into a second oak'.[15] Similar complications arise when considering the choice of a raven to represent Fox: if Coleridge intended the poem to be read as a straightforward satirical animal fable, of a type exemplified by 'The Magpie' or 'King Chaunticlere', why did he not choose a fox as his title character, and alter the narrative to suit this? This is further complicated by the fact that the manuscript note upon which Woodring builds his link between the raven and Fox was written almost twenty years after the poem's composition, and does not appear ever to have been intended for publication.[16] Without the ambiguous implication it contains, the choice of a raven, like the inclusion of the swine, becomes much harder to bring within a cohesive satirical reading of the poem as a whole.

When Coleridge anonymously published 'The Raven' in the *Morning Post* in March 1798, he further complicated its allegorical significance. 'Sir', he writes in its prefixed letter to the editor (signed 'CUDDY'),

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[14] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, pp. 135-36.
[15] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 136.
[16] *CPW*, i. p. 171.

> I am not absolutely certain that the following Poem was written by EDMUND SPENSER [...]. But a learned Antiquarian of my acquaintance has given it as his opinion, that it resembles SPENSER's minor Poems.[17]

Rather than linking the poem to contemporary satirical animal fables, this introduction casts its events in a different light, highlighting instead their similarity to Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, and particularly to the February eclogue.[18] Here Spenser's shepherd Thenot recounts a story about 'A goodly Oak' that

> Whylome had bene the King of the field,
> And mochell mast to the husband did yielde,
> And with his Nuts larded many Swine.[19]

The similarities between the two works are immediately plain (both of them referring to a woodman or husbandman, 'swine', and an oak's 'mast'), such that by flagging them up so explicitly Coleridge forces the reader to reassess the symbolic significance of his poem in this light.

Thenot's narrative illustrates the dangers of ambition. It describes how a 'bragging' briar convinces a husbandman to cut down the oak (which it sought to rival), only to wither without the oak's protection from the harsh winter weather.[20] Michael Wiley notes the underlying similarities between this warning against 'ambitious' rebellion (against perceived 'Tyranny') and Burkean conservatism, contending that both imply 'the need [...] to respect and venerate tradition, to avoid rebelling against the status quo'.[21] Such a reading cannot be applied so simply to 'The Raven', in which neither the swine nor the Woodman act through ambition, or rebel against any explicitly stated social code or status quo (indeed, the Woodman does exactly what his name suggests, on his own initiative). Even the moralistic quality of Spenser's narrative (namely its punishment of a transgression) is lost in 'The Raven', where the ultimate victims of the shipwreck have nothing to do with the original felling of the tree. Yet by placing the poem in the overtly moral and, as Wiley argues, conservative framework of Thenot's tale, Coleridge asks the reader to think again about his own meaning, and to analyse the poem's politics accordingly.[22] In so doing he adds another layer of allegorical complexity to the narrative, further frustrating attempts at interpretation.

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[17] *Morning Post*, 10 Mar. 1798 [7 Feb. 2020].

[18] Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579), pp. 13-21.

[19] Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*, p. 17.

[20] Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*, p. 17.

[21] Michael Wiley, 'Coleridge's "The Raven" and the Forging of Radicalism', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 43 (2003): p. 805.

Coleridge's choice to complicate his poem in this way may be better understood in the context of the way in which the pastoral eclogue, and specifically Spenser's eclogues, were used in the 1790s. Earlier in the century Swift and William Harrison had made the 'Town Eclogue' a popular way of satirising the degenerate and decidedly un-pastoral behaviour of city dwellers, and this satirical application was continued by John Gay and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in later decades.[23] The tradition was preserved throughout the century, and in 1799 a series of satirical 'Political Eclogues' would be appended to the *Rolliad*.[24] By framing itself as an eclogue, Coleridge's 'Raven' implicitly gestures towards this context.

It perhaps most clearly reflects the more explicitly Spenserian political eclogues of the 1790s. In 1795 (a year before 'The Raven') Richard 'Citizen' Lee had published *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy, A Political Eclogue*, attributing it to Robert Merry ('Mr. M-r-y') on the title page.[25] The poem presents itself as an eclogue in the vein of those in the *Shepheardes Calender*, recounting a pastoral singing competition between 'Two maudling Shepherds very dull and flat': the eponymous Pitti-Clout (i.e. Pitt) and Dun-Cuddy (i.e. Dundas).[26] These shepherds, whose names recall Spenser's Colin Clout and Cuddy (the latter featuring in his February and October eclogues), attempt to outdo one another in song, until their judge, 'Bullæmon' (John Bull), cuts them off:

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[22] Michael Wiley, 'Coleridge's "The Raven" and the Forging of Radicalism', p. 805.

[23] *A Collection of Poems*, 6 vols (London: J. Hughs, for R. and J. Dodsley, 1763), i. pp. 82-104; Pat Rogers, 'Swift the Poet', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 188.

[24] *The Rolliad, in Two Parts; Probationary Odes for the Laureatship; and Political Eclogues*, 2 vols (London: J. Ridgway, 1799); Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 96.

[25] Mr. M-r-y, *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy, A Political Eclogue; Wherein is Expressed in Courtly Lays, The Inviolable Attachment and Constant Loves of the Treasury Shepherds, and their Firm Resolutions to Sacrifice Everything that Opposes the Possession of their Respective Sweethearts, Polly Power and Sally Plunder* (London: Citizen Lee, 1795); Jon Mee discusses the attribution in *Print, Publicity and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 127.

[26] M-r-y, *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy*, p. 3.

> "Enough, enough, ye Shepherds! cease the strain,
> "I now must interrupt you, to complain;
> "For while I listen'd to your *rhiming clink*,
> "You've eat up all my meat, and drank my drink; […]
> "And to my mind, unless your manners alter,
> "THE ONLY PRIZE YE MERIT IS, A HALTER".[27]

The attack here comes at the expense of the shepherds themselves, with Bullæmon's final recommendation of a 'halter', euphemistically implying a noose, comically undermining their bluster. This final verdict, with its decisive closing taunt at the title characters, confirms the expectation set up by the narrator at the poem's outset. Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy are proved to be as 'dull and flat' as the reader was told they would be, and their selfish 'stale drunkenness' gets its just reward: ridicule.[28]

Writing in this mode a few months later, Coleridge noticeably avoids such a conclusion. The shipwreck with which the poem concludes marks a significant shift in tone from its opening, one that Coleridge emphasises in parallel suggestions to the reader to observe the unfolding events. After the 'Grunting' swine have 'trotted away' from the oak at the start of the poem, the narrator states that 'One acorn they left & no more mote you spy', before introducing the raven and making light of their 'folly'.[29] At the poem's close, however, the stakes are much higher. The ship constructed from the (second) felled oak 'bulg[es] on a rock' and founders, before the final lines urge the reader similarly to take heed:

> See, she sinks! O'er the top mast the mad water rolls!
> Very glad was the Raven, that this fate they did *meet*:
> They had taken his all, & REVENGE WAS SWEET![30]

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[27] M-r-y, *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy*, p. 7.

[28] M-r-y, *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy*, p. 3.

[29] *Poems*, i. p. 318.

[30] *Poems*, pp. 319-20.

Unlike *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy*, ‘The Raven’ conspicuously confounds the reader’s expectations in these closing lines. Because the swine’s initial ‘crunch[ing]’ of the tree was so easily dismissed as folly, this final bloodthirsty anger comes as something of a surprise, especially considering the fact that the victims on whom the ‘revenge’ is wrought had no part in the original offence. The double meaning within the word ‘meet’ draws attention to this discrepancy, highlighting that the punishment is in fact not meet at all. Similarly, the imperative injunction to ‘See’ underlines its momentousness in a manner very different from the opening lines’ sing-song syntax in the phrase ‘no more mote you spy’. Thus where ‘The Raven’ starts as a light-hearted and fashionable Spenserian political eclogue, it ends as something altogether gloomier and less straightforward.

By abruptly invalidating the reader’s expectations in this way (just as he had complicated the poem’s various layers of allegorical significance), Coleridge makes an implicit comment on those expectations themselves. The comic recommendation of violence with which *Pitti-Clout and Dun-Cuddy* closes becomes, in ‘The Raven’, a rather darker and less funny conclusion. Coleridge thus dramatically strips the poem’s timeworn satirical images and generic motifs of the meanings that a 1790s reader would expect them to possess, demonstrating by the end of the poem that they cannot be placed within a simple extant allegorical framework. In this way he undermines the easy assumptions (about the significance of swine and oaks, for instance) that are promoted by the contemporary allegorical satires to which he nods, entrapping readers who, to use his own words, ‘will not permit even a Raven to be a Raven, nor a Fox a Fox’.[31]

The scepticism about satirical allegory evident in ‘The Raven’ looks forward to the broader scepticism that Coleridge would go one to develop about the truthfulness of allegory as a literary technique. This scepticism is particularly visible in *The Statesman’s Manual*, where he asserts that

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[31] *CPW*, i. p. 171.

> an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot.[32]

Allegories, Coleridge stresses, do not display the inherent truth of their referent, but merely associate arbitrary 'picture[s]' with that truth. In this light, 'The Raven' may be read as an early exposure of the arbitrary nature of that association, highlighting that allegories are not always to be trusted.

This notion of trust lies at the core of Coleridge's point. 'The Raven' does not criticise satirical allegories themselves, but rather the blind acceptance of their symbolic significance (a suggestion that Nicholas Halmi gestures towards in his essay 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol'). Commenting on passages like the one above from *The Statesman's Manual*, Halmi writes that these 'reflect neither the full range of his comments on allegory, for they were often sympathetic, nor his own willingness to resort to the mode'.[33] If, as Halmi suggests, Coleridge's quarrel is not necessarily with the use of allegory (however 'worthless' it might be as a means of expressing truth), the purpose of 'The Raven' must be read differently. It becomes more of an attack, of sorts, upon those readers who allow themselves to be misled by allegory into unthinking assumption.

In order to read the poem in this way, it is necessary to consider why it was written. Though it was published in the *Morning Post* in March 1798, there is no evidence that Coleridge had this medium in mind when he composed it over a year earlier, and indeed J. C. C. Mays speculates that it may even have initially been considered for inclusion in *Lyrical Ballads*.[34] What is clear, however, is that it is an intensely personal poem. In the wake of the commercial failure of *The Watchman* earlier that year, Coleridge's letters of late 1796 and early 1797 reveal a despondency with regard to the tastes of the reading public. His correspondence with Thelwall in particular during this period reveals the connection between his personal dejection (palpable in assertions that 'I am not *fit* for *public* Life'), and his sense of 'the Bankrupt Honesty of the Public'.[35] Coleridge's resentment here is unspecific: he does not take issue with a particular readership or political affiliation, but with an abstract notion of the 'public' in both cases. Perhaps as a result of the failure of his political projects (not least Pantisocracy), or of his rural remove from cosmopolitan life, Coleridge articulates a generalised aversion to the tastes and behaviours of contemporary British society—an approach very different from the specific appeals for greater reflection amongst his audience in his 1795 lectures and prose.[36]

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[32] S. T. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual,* in *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 30.
[33] Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 346.
[34] *Poems*, i. p. 316.

This general resentment goes some way towards explaining the significance, and the intended effect, of 'The Raven'. As well as confronting and undermining the assumptions prompted by allegorical satires, particularly those printed by individuals and publications traditionally critical of the government (like the *Morning Chronicle*, 'Citizen' Lee, or Eaton), 'The Raven' also appears to refer to non-satirical publications of which Coleridge also disapproved.[37] The figure of the Woodman, for instance, bears a resemblance to the woodman in *The Monk*, which he was reviewing for the *Critical Review* at this time.[38] Clad in 'leather' like Coleridge's Woodman in 'leathern guise', Matthew Lewis' 'Wood-man' attempts to deceive, rob and murder the Marquis de las Cisternas.[39] The Marquis escapes, and learns more about the woodman's cruelty from the woman initially presumed to be his wife, but who in fact had been held captive by him under threat of violence.[40] The scene illustrates Coleridge's broader criticism of *The Monk*, namely that it relies too heavily upon excessively horrific scenes, replete with 'shrieks' and 'rape and murder', in order to excite an audience with 'powerful stimulants [that] can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite'.[41] For Coleridge, the popular success of *The Monk* reveals the underlying lassitude and thoughtlessness of an audience so overstimulated that it can only take pleasure in (and be further corrupted by) accounts of suffering.[42]

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[35] *CL,* i. pp. 277, 285.

[36] See *CL*, i, p. 165.

[37] Alan Vardy, *Constructing Coleridge: The Posthumous Life of the Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 10.

[38] S. T. Coleridge, 'Review of Matthew G. Lewis "The Monk"', *The Critical Review*, 2.19 (Feb. 1797): p. 194.

[39] Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. D. L. Macdonald & Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough: Broadview Literary Texts, 2004), p. 114.

[40] Lewis, *Monk*, pp. 114-31.

As such, alongside its inversion of popular satirical tropes, 'The Raven' also suggests a criticism (or at the least a manifestation of Coleridge's disapproval) of the popular appeal of 'Monk' Lewis. Coleridge's diagnosis of the corruptive influence of *The Monk*, as articulated in his review, is reiterated in the raven's moral corruption at the poem's close, where we see it driven (by the actions of the Woodman) to a perverse pleasure in the 'shriek[s]' of the shipwreck's 'perishing souls'.[43] Whether consciously or not, the raven's fate distinctly mirrors that which, to Coleridge's mind, had been experienced by readers of *The Monk*: we see, in the raven, the corruptive influence of such appetites made manifest. Once this aspect of the poem is appreciated, the breadth and variety of its numerous criticisms and subversions of contemporary culture become visible. By combining his critique of the unthinking use of commonplace satirical allegories (and the easy deductions that these lead their readers to make) with this condemnation of the negative effects of *The Monk*'s 'powerful stimulants', Coleridge attributes to both a mutual harmfulness, one that stems from a single underlying issue: the thoughtless passivity of the reading public. Unable to see past their own prejudices, or beyond a particular frame of mind, they are no longer able fully to engage in active sympathy.

Coleridge's criticism, then, is a general one. Whatever specific audience or medium he may have had in mind when he wrote the poem (if any), its message is plainly relevant to contemporary readers in general. By associating in 'The Raven' the faults of satire with his outspoken critique of *The Monk*, Coleridge points towards the root cause of the symptoms he diagnoses and seeks to challenge. As he had posited many times in his satire (and his comments on satire) in previous years, Coleridge suggests in 'The Raven' that such texts discourage active thought and critical scrutiny. The final corruption of the raven's moral judgement, with its echoes of the overstimulating and corruptive effects of *The Monk*, mirrors the unpleasant consequences of this passivity. If one does not consider for oneself the significance of commonplace arguments and allegories, appetites and tastes, one may be led astray. Read in this light, 'The Raven' is not necessarily a satire itself, but rather a subversion and condemnation of the impulses behind the contemporary satires of which Coleridge disapproved. A product of Coleridge's retreat from public life, written in the wake of the snapping of his 'squeaking baby-trumpet of Sedition', the poem appears to be not so much an attempt to change readers' minds as a private expression of despair about the state of British society.[44]

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[41] Coleridge, 'Review of Matthew G. Lewis "The Monk"', p. 194.

[42] Daniel P. Watkins, 'Social Hierarchy in Matthew Lewis's "The Monk"', *Studies in the Novel*, 18 (1986): p. 115.

[43] *Poems*, i. p. 320.

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[44] *CL*, i. p. 240.

3.2

Coleridge's shifting perception of his public role continued to have a marked effect on his satirical writing in the subsequent months. Rather than seeking to encourage independent reflection so 'that all may know the truth; and that the truth may make us free' (as *The Watchman*'s motto proclaims), his satire turns further inward, towards his own flaws and those of his immediate circle.[1] Nowhere is this more clear than in the three sonnets Coleridge published in the *Morning Post* under the pseudonym Nehemiah Higginbottom in the issue of the *Monthly Magazine* for November 1797. Written, as he would state in *Biographia Literaria*, 'to expose risu honesto the three sins of poetry, one or the other of which is the most likely to beset a young writer', the sonnets take aim at the stylistic quirks and perceived failings of his own and his friends' poems (particularly those published in the 1797 volume *Poems*, produced with Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd).[2] This open and seemingly straightforward ridicule of specific individuals personally known to him suggests on the face of it an increasing tendency to indulge his instinct for satire, and an increasing movement away from his past efforts, of which there were still traces in the previous year's 'The Raven', to flag up satire's inherent moral harmfulness.

Charles Lloyd (who had been sent by his father to live with and be tutored by Coleridge) appears to bear the brunt of his mockery.[3] The first sonnet responds directly to the tone and phrasing of Lloyd's contributions to *Poems*, presenting a series of excessively melancholic and egotistical reflections upon a natural scene:

> Pensive, at eve, on the hard world I mused,
> And my poor heart was sad: so at the moon
> I gaz'd—and sigh'd, and sigh'd!—for, ah! how soon
> Eve darkens into night. Mine eye perus'd
> With tearful vacancy, the *dampy* grass,
> Which wept and glitter'd in the paly ray:
> And I did pause me on my lonely way

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[1] *TW*, i. p. 3.
[2] *BL*, i. pp. 26-27.
[3] Christopher Rubinstein, 'Coleridge, the Wedgwood Annuity and Edmund Oliver', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 20 (2002): p. 133.

And mus'd me on the wretched ones, who pass
O'er the bleak heath of SORROW. But, alas!
Most of MYSELF I thought: when it befell,
That the sooth SPIRIT of the breezy wood
Breath'd in mine ear—'All this is very well;
But much of *one* thing is for *no* thing good.'
Ah! my poor heart's inexplicable swell![4]

This ridicule of '*doleful egotism*' (as Coleridge later put it) resembles the work of all three poets of the 1797 volume to varying degrees. Lamb's sonnets for example are replete with images of 'Despair' and 'desponding love-sick[ness]', whilst Coleridge's poems explicitly advocate the 'mingled charm' of 'manliest melancholy'.[5] It is with Lloyd, however, that the resemblance is strongest.

Almost all of his contributions contain introspective accounts of sadness akin to those in Coleridge's parody. 'Sonnet VI', for instance, describes 'Those big-swoln broodings [...] / Which made my lone-heart fancifully ache', before moving on to similar testimonies of how his 'feverish mind' is 'sicklied with thought'.[6] The first Higginbottom sonnet's declaration that 'my poor heart was sad', with its almost tautological simplicity, neatly parodies the repetitive quality of these musings. Reducing the tone of Lloyd's verse in this way, the sonnet builds to a crescendo in the declaration that 'alas! / Most of MYSELF I thought!', a line that tips Lloyd's 'brooding' introspection firmly into self-absorption. Yet as well as ridiculing Lloyd's mournful egotism, Coleridge goes a step further in mocking his choice of language. Carefully borrowing expressions like 'hard world', 'paly', and 'my poor heart' from the 1797 volume, the sonnet takes direct aim at individual Lloyd poems—notably 'The Melancholy Man' (the first poem of his section), which similarly extends the word 'pale' solely to fill out the metre of a line describing 'eve's meek star with paly eye'.[7] By identifying Lloyd's poems so specifically, Coleridge singles his work out for direct and highly personal ridicule unlike that of any satirical writing he had published to date.

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[4] *Poems*, i. p. 356.

[5] S. T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd, *Poems* (Bristol: N. Biggs, 1797), pp. 75, 217, 222.

[6] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 175.

[7] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 154. Descriptions of Lloyd's 'poor heart' may be found in many poems. See for example Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, pp. 171, 172, 175, 176, 177, 178. 'Hard world' appears on Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 174.

Lamb is often claimed to be the chief target of the second Higginbottom sonnet, which takes aim at affected simplicity:

> O! I do love thee, meek *Simplicity*!
> For of thy lays the lulling simpleness
> Goes to my heart, and soothes each small distress,
> Distress tho' small, yet haply great to me!
> 'Tis true, on lady Fortune's gentlest pad
> I amble on; yet, tho' I know not why
> *So* sad I am!—but should a friend and I
> Grow cool and *miff*, O! I am *very* sad!
> And then with sonnets and with sympathy
> My dreamy bosom's mystic woes I pall;
> Now of my false friend plaining plaintively,
> Now raving at mankind in general;
> But whether sad or fierce, 'tis simple all,
> All very simple, meek SIMPLICITY![8]

Like Gurion Taussig before her, Marianne Van Remoortel places the sonnet principally in the context of Coleridge's discussions of poetry with Lamb, and the fact that, as Van Remoortel puts it (quoting Lamb's correspondence), 'In November of the same year, Lamb advised: "Cultivate simplicity, Coleridge; or rather, I should say, banish elaborateness"'.[9] Certainly the poem does reflect the 'meek quietness' Lamb praises in his sonnets, which is echoed in the first and last lines' references to meekness.[10] In the same vein, the sonnet also highlights the unimaginative simplicity of the repeated weeping 'complaint[s]' in Lamb's poems by reducing them to another meaningless tautology, in the account of his 'plaining plaintively'.[11] As such, though there is some disagreement about how slighted Lamb really felt, he appears to have had at least some cause for taking offence.[12]

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[8] *Poems*, i. pp. 356-57.

[9] Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship, 1789-1804* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 73; Marianne Van Remoortel, *Lives of the Sonnet, 1787–1895: Genre, Gender and Criticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 236.

[10] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 220.

Yet here too it is Lloyd that seems to be targeted the more strongly. Though Lamb's contributions do bear evidence of the flaws Coleridge highlights, Lloyd's are replete with them. References to 'simplicity', 'simple fare', 'simple scene[s]', and 'simple day[s]' litter his poems in a manner strikingly similar to that parodied in the second Higginbottom sonnet, whilst Coleridge's and Lamb's poems do not use the word itself once.[13] Similarly, and perhaps most damningly, the poem appears physically to depict Lloyd in the speaker's account of himself ambling 'on Lady Fortune's gentlest pad'. Lloyd's father was a prosperous Birmingham banker and Lloyd himself had consequently been well provided for, making it hard, as Felicity James suggests, 'not to read another attack on Lloyd' into Coleridge's representation of his sonnet's speaker.[14] By including this detail, he adds further insult to what was previously simply a parody of what he felt to be his poetic failings. Not only are Lloyd's repeated celebrations of rustic simplicity laughably uninventive, but from the pen of one so wealthy they are also, Coleridge suggests, hypocritical.

It seems, then, that Coleridge had come to dislike (or at least be irritated by) his young friend and charge. This is the conclusion at which both Tim Fulford and Christopher Rubinstein arrive, the latter contending that 'Coleridge was openly displaying utter contempt for Lloyd. We do not know why'.[15] Rubinstein goes on to speculate that 'It is possible there was some sexual impropriety while Lloyd was a member of the Coleridge household', whilst Fulford suggests instead that Coleridge had simply grown 'Tired of the clinging neediness of Lloyd'.[16] Gurion Taussig takes a still more negative view of Coleridge's motivations, contending that the Higginbottom sonnets served merely as 'a vehicle' with which the more established poet could go about 'belittling his neophytic subordinates'.[17] Adopting Taussig's highly critical point of view, one could perhaps go as far as to suggest jealousy as a possible motive. Lloyd had recently been praised in a review of *Poems* published in the *Monthly Visitor*, which had stated that 'There is much simplicity, sweetness, and promise in the poetry of Lloyd'.[18] Picking up so particularly on a quality that seemed to have pleased some critics, Coleridge almost appears to be correcting their conclusion in an attempt to muddy Lloyd's name. That Lloyd never fully forgave Coleridge (later composing a veiled attack upon him in *Edmund Oliver*) only strengthens such a claim.[19] Whatever the underlying motivation, it is clear that Coleridge's mockery of Lloyd is far more bitter and unambiguously personal than anything he had previously published.

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[11] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 222.

[12] Tim Fulford groups Lamb's reaction with Lloyd's explicit offence, arguing that 'The so-called Higginbottom sonnets offended Lloyd and Lamb'. Tim Fulford, *Romantic Poetry and Literary Coteries: The Dialect of the Tribe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 42. J. E. Morpurgo, however, argues that Lamb 'would not have taken offence at the "Higginbottom Sonnets" for these "Sonnets Attempted in the Manner of Contemporary Writers" were frivolities of a kind which, in happier times, Lamb would have enjoyed and which he would have fashioned more craftily than Coleridge'. Charles Lamb, *Selected Writings*, ed. J. E. Morpurgo (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. xxiii.

[13] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, pp. 195, 198, 211, 212.

[14] Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 117.

[15] Fulford, *Romantic Poetry and Literary Coteries*, p. 42; Rubinstein, 'Coleridge, the Wedgwood Annuity and *Edmund Oliver*', p. 129.

This palpable shift reinforces the sense that Coleridge's attitude to satire had changed. In his 1795 lectures and pamphlets and in *The Watchman* he had written satirical material that aligned with his broader political goals, namely to encourage audiences to free themselves from the 'herd' and to 'serve the cause of freedom by *thinking*'.[20] However, having 'snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition' and retreated to a more private life in Nether Stowey after the failure of *The Watchman* in 1796, his satire also seemingly moves into a more private register less aligned with his previous political objectives. For Felicity James, the Higginbottom sonnets must first and foremost be understood in this more private context, not as an attempt to change readers' minds and moral compasses, but rather as a personal statement of his developing poetic identity. She argues that Coleridge was by late 1797 'outgrowing his early style of sensibility', and consequently felt weighed down by his reviewers' perception of a 'Coleridgean school' in which his own style aligned closely with the excessively melancholic and egotistical mawkishness he mocks in Lloyd.[21] For James, Coleridge is thus primarily 'using parody of himself and others as a means of transition and distraction', signalling to the reading public that he has entered a new stage in his personal poetic development.[22]

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[16] Fulford, *Romantic Poetry and Literary Coteries*, p. 42; Rubinstein, 'Coleridge, the Wedgwood Annuity and *Edmund Oliver*', p. 129.

[17] Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship*, p. 236.

[18] *The Monthly Visitor, and Pocket Companion*, 9 vols (London: H. D. Symonds, 1797-1800), ii. p. 180.

[19] Charles Lloyd, *Edmund Oliver*, 2 vols (Bristol: Joseph Cottle, 1798). The veiled attack on Coleridge is discussed by Richard Allen in 'Charles Lloyd, Coleridge, and "Edmund Oliver"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 35 (1996): pp. 245-294.

[20] *TW*, pp. 98, 13.

James's sense of this highly personal motivation corroborates the notion that Coleridge's attitude towards satire had changed. Where his 1795 and 1796 satire had looked outward, challenging readers and reshaping popular prejudice, the Higginbottom sonnets thus may be said to look inwards: rather than addressing societal failings, they represent Coleridge shaping a new identity for himself. In so doing, they allow him to give vent to an instinct he had long suppressed. His correspondence with Southey in 1794 (discussed in Chapter One) suggests that he had always possessed, but had attempted to control, an impulsive tendency towards personal satire. Whether refraining from ridiculing the mayor of Cambridge, or regretting past mockery of his tutor Bowyer, Coleridge had in previous years displayed a desire to temper his satirical instincts in the service of a higher goal: preaching moral principles 'ad Populum'.[23] His perceived inability to achieve this goal, epitomised in the failure of *The Watchman* (which, as his comments in *Biographia Literaria* imply, would prove a lifelong embarrassment), appears to have released him from this sense of duty.[24] Revelling in public mockery of his former collaborators, Coleridge seems finally to succumb to the pleasures of satire.

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[21] James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth*, p. 115; *Monthly Visitor*, Aug. 1797 [13 Feb. 2020].
[22] James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth*, p. 115.
[23] *CL*, i. pp. 110, 65.
[24] See for instance *BL*, i. p. 187.

3.3

Yet even in the midst of this open indulgence in ridicule, a certain discomfort with its implications may be discerned. Though Lloyd in particular felt especially scorned by Coleridge's withering mockery, the Higginbottom sonnets do contain hints that his real intentions were not so vindictively personal. The third sonnet, entitled 'On a Ruined House in a Romantic Country', is central to understanding what these intentions may have been. Unlike the first two, it is immediately apparent that its central target is Coleridge himself, and specifically the elaborate and archaic diction for which he had been criticised in the press.[1] Focusing on his own failings in this way, Coleridge not only moderates his parody of Lloyd and Lamb with an equal (if not more) forceful satire upon himself, but he also provides clues as to how he intended the sonnets to be read as a group. Rather than seeking to ridicule his friends to prove his own independence from the circle they had formed, the third sonnet points towards a more altruistic motivation, one that does not corroborate what had previously seemed so stark a departure from his earlier approach to satire.

Among the most conspicuous differences between the third Higginbottom sonnet and the preceding two is its archaic diction, evident from the first line:

> And this reft house is that, the which he built,
> Lamented Jack! And here his malt he pil'd,
> Cautious in vain! These rats that squeak so wild,
> Squeak, not unconscious of their father's guilt.
> Did ye not see her gleaming thro' the glade!
> Belike 'twas she, the maiden all forlorn.
> What tho' she milk no cow with crumpled horn,
> Yet, *aye*, she haunts the dale where *erst* she stray'd:
> And, *aye*, beside her stalks her amorous knight!
> Still on his thighs their wonted brogues are worn,
> And thro' those brogues, still tatter'd and betorn,
> His hindward charms gleam an unearthly white;
> As when thro' broken clouds at night's high noon

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[1] See for instance John Aikin, '*Poems on various subjects*, by S. T. Coleridge', in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. Donald Reiman, 2 vols (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), ii. pp. 706-09. Discussed further below.

Peeps in fair fragments forth the full-orb'd harvest-moon![2]

The sonnet's careful focus on archaisms (stressing its *ayes*, for instance, not only with italics but also by enclosing them within punctuation that forces the reader to pause) highlights that Coleridge has a different target in mind from that of the previous sonnets. Lloyd, unlike Lamb, does use the word once (to describe how 'aye at welcome eve' he greeted his late grandmother), and he also occasionally uses the word 'erst', as well as more contemporarily common elements of archaic poetic diction (such as 'didst').[3] Such instances are not, however, ubiquitous within his writing, which for the most part bears out contemporary critics' (and Coleridge's) accounts of its unelaborate 'simplicity'.[4]

The principal target of the sonnet's mockery, then, can only be Coleridge himself. His poems frequently employ the words singled out by the Higginbottom sonnet, often in instances where the tone they convey is not warranted by the subject matter. In the 1796 *Poems* volume's 'Effusion IV' (written in praise of Priestley), for instance, Coleridge describes Justice 'Insulting aye the wrongs of patient Folly'.[5] Given the poem's central contention that Priestley has triumphed over the misguided 'Superstition' and the 'cumbrous pomp unholy' of previous ages, Coleridge's use of pompous antiquated language (another outdated legacy of former times) is somewhat out of place. Seizing on this flaw, the third Higginbottom sonnet exaggerates this sense of the incongruity of Coleridge's archaisms for comic effect. Instead of an encomium upon modern rationality, however, the subject matter has become that of a nursery rhyme, namely, 'The House that Jack Built' (which similarly features maidens all forlorn and cows with crumpled horns).[6] Placing the same archaisms in this palpably inappropriate context, Coleridge highlights the absurdity of his own predilection for them.

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[2] *Poems*, i. p. 357.

[3] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, pp. 195, 197.

[4] *The Monthly Visitor, and Pocket Companion*, 9 vols (London: H. D. Symonds, 1797-1800), ii. p. 180.

[5] S. T. Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G. G. and J. Robinsons, 1796), p. 48.

[6] The nursery rhyme was first recorded in 1755 (though Guy Davenport suspects it is older), and it was well-known by Coleridge's day. Guy Davenport, 'The House That Jack Built', *Salmagundi*, 43 (1979): p. 141.

This self-mockery may be read in part as a response to contemporary critics. Many reviewers had commented on Coleridge's obscure and antiquated language, often singling out 'Religious Musings' for particular criticism. Writing in the *Monthly Review*, for instance, John Aikin describes the poem as 'Often obscure, uncouth, and verging to extravagance'.[7] Responding to his critics in the preface to the 1797 *Poems* volume, Coleridge acknowledges the validity of their judgement by stressing that he has sought to amend his poems where possible (though he admits that in some cases 'I have omitted to disentangle the weed from the fear of snapping the flower').[8] The third Higginbottom sonnet, seen in this light, may be read as another acceptance of his reviewers' criticisms, a perspective that is particularly apparent when the poem is compared to a 1796 review of Southey's *Joan of Arc* (to which Coleridge had contributed). Addressing the poets' use of 'antiquated expressions', the writer censures the poem's divergence

> from the customary language,—as in the frequent use of the word *aye* for *always*, and particularly when the same monosyllable is compounded with an adjective, as it is sometimes used in the manner of Spencer [sic], both by Mr. Southey and Mr. Coleridge.[9]

The third Higginbottom sonnet, with its deliberate emphasis upon the incongruity of the word '*aye*', nods to such criticisms, tacitly confirming their validity by incorporating them into its attack. By mocking this flaw in himself (and perhaps by association Southey, who was also offended by the Higginbottom sonnets), Coleridge appears to affirm the validity of his reviewers' criticisms.[10]

Siding with his critics in this way was nothing new for Coleridge. Writing in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge tells an anecdote about a piece of epigrammatic self-satire he claims to have composed in 1799:

> An amateur performer in verse expressed to a common friend a strong desire to be introduced to me, but hesitated in accepting my friend's immediate offer, on the score that "he was, he must acknowledge, the author of a confounded severe epigram on my Ancient Mariner, which had given me great pain." I assured my friend that, if the epigram was a good one, it would only

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[7] Aikin, '*Poems on various subjects*, by S. T. Coleridge', p. 197.

[8] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. xvii.

[9] *The Critical Review; or Annals of Literature*, ser. 2, 38 vols (London: A. Hamilton, 1796), xvii. pp. 186-87.

[10] See *CL*, i. p. 359.

> increase my desire to become acquainted with the author, and begged to hear it recited: when, to my no less surprise than amusement, it proved to be one which I had myself some time before written and inserted in the "Morning Post," to wit—
>
> *To the Author of the Ancient Mariner.*
>
> *Your poem must eternal be,*
> *Dear sir! it cannot fail,*
> *For 'tis incomprehensible,*
> *And without head or tail.*[11]

The anecdote is apocryphal. Though Coleridge did publish such an epigram in the *Morning Post*, it was in fact a translation from Lessing's *Sinngedichte*, one that he had addressed not '*To the Author of the Ancient Mariner*' but rather '*TO MR. PYE*', the poet laureate.[12] Nevertheless, Coleridge's account reveals a clear pleasure in the idea of anticipating the ridicule of his critics, anonymously endorsing their objections in a manner strikingly reminiscent of Higginbottom's similarly anonymous self-mockery.

Coleridge evidently had a fondness for beating his critics at their own game. For Graeme Stones, the sonnets must be understood primarily in this light, as an attempt at 'pre-emptive or diversionary self-parody'.[13] If he did seek to anticipate and neutralise future satirists' lines of attack, as Stones' comment suggests, he was perhaps prompted to do so by the publication of the first issue of *The Anti-Jacobin* (which parodies Southey's 'Inscription for the apartment in Chepstow Castle') a few days before the Higginbottom sonnets were printed in the *Monthly Magazine*.[14] The turnaround time would have been tight if this was the case. The first *Anti-Jacobin* was published on 20 November, and on around the same day (Griggs is unsure of the exact date) Coleridge tells Cottle that he has composed the three sonnets, which would be published at the end of the month.[15] Such rapid composition would not be unheard of for Coleridge (who often boasted of his compositional speed), and indeed Erdman affirms that it is

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[11] *BL*, i, p. 28.

[12] *Poems*, ii. pp. 584-85.

[13] Graeme Stones, 'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist: Coleridge and Self-exposure in the Higginbottom Sonnets', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 100 (1997): p. 132.

[14] *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, 2 vols (London: J. Hatchard, 1803), i. p. 35.

[15] *CL*, i. p. 356-58.

‘technically possible’ that the sonnets were a response to the *Anti-Jacobin*.[16] If so, Coleridge appears correctly to predict that he himself would become a target of Canning and his collaborators (notably in ‘New Morality’, discussed further in Part Two). Under Stones’ reasoning, the sonnets could then certainly be read as an attempt to defuse a potential line of satirical attack by preemptively depriving it of its originality.

Such a reading does not, however, wholly account for the consonance of the third Higginbottom sonnet with other private satirical self-critiques that Coleridge does not appear ever to have intended to publish. Sending ‘The Nightingale’ to Wordsworth in early 1798, a few months after the sonnets were published, he encloses a short comic poem which announces that ‘In stale blank verse a subject stale / I send *per post* my *Nightingale*’, before stating his view of the poem:

> My opinion’s briefly this—
> His *bill* he opens not amiss
> And when he has sung a stave or so,
> His breast, & some small space below,
> So throbs & swells, that you might swear
> No vulgar music’s working there.
> So far, so good; but then, ’od rot him!
> There’s something falls off at his bottom.
> Yet, sure, no wonder it should breed,
> That my Bird’s Tail’s a tail indeed
> And makes it’s own inglorious harmony
> Æolio crepitû, non carmine.[17]

Like the third Higginbottom sonnet, the poem reduces Coleridge’s ‘throbs & swells’ of poetic sublimity to the level of vulgarity. Just as the sonnet’s ornate and archaic language is ultimately undermined by the amorous knight’s self-exposure in the final lines, so Coleridge’s doggerel here implies that his ‘Nightingale’ is similarly undermined by the ‘inglorious harmony’ emerging from beneath its veneer of sweetness and respectability. Rather than representing a calculated attempt to ward off future satire, the third Higginbottom sonnet begins to appear part of a broader expression of deeply felt personal insecurity about his own work.

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[16] He tells Poole, for instance, that he wrote the ‘Portrait of Pitt’ in a single ‘Evening, without previous meditation on it’. *CL*, i. p. 581. Erdman discusses the technical possibility of the *Anti-Jacobin*’s influence in David V. Erdman, ‘Coleridge as Nehemiah Higginbottom’, *Modern Language Notes*, 73 (1958): p. 572.

[17] *Poems*, i. p. 521.

Traces of this self-doubt, often expressed in self-mockery and satire, are evident amongst Coleridge's work long before the negative critical responses to his choice of language in the *Poems* volumes. In his 1790 piece 'Monody on a Tea-Kettle', Coleridge parodies his 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton', applying that poem's heightened 'melancholy dirge' to the trifling subject of a 'tea-kettle [that] is spoilt' (much as in the third Higginbottom sonnet he uses his grandiose archaisms to convey the subject matter of a nursery rhyme).[18] The shift, as *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature* succinctly puts it, 'derives humour from the incongruous match between serious form and light-hearted subject', revealing a tendency towards self-mockery that critics have similarly discerned lingering beneath much of Coleridge's work over the subsequent years.[19]

Richard Matlak for instance argues that the 'Eolian Harp' also displays this self-doubt and instinctive self-mockery, because it reveals the influence of Swift's depiction of the Aeolists in *A Tale of a Tub*. Just as the false prophets of this sect are exposed by Swift as 'Pretenders to Inspiration', emitting 'oracular belches' rather than genuine prophecy, so Coleridge's Eolian philosophy of the natural world is shown to be, as Matlak puts it, a 'philosophic bubble', 'burst by [Sara's] reproachful glance'.[20] Matlak's point reflects the Lambs' response to the poem. Commenting on the concluding verse paragraph in a letter to Coleridge, they find it, above all else, to be amusing. The image of 'Mrs. C. checking your wild wanderings', they announce, 'delighted us'.[21] Rather than representing the more serious restraint of blasphemous tendencies that it is sometimes taken to be today, Sara's response appears merely a deflation of the intellectual pretensions of a husband too deeply immersed in ‘vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring’.[22] In this context, the third Higginbottom sonnet forms just one expression of Coleridge’s long-held anxiety (pre-dating reviewers’ comments on *Poems*) regarding the absence of true inspiration within his overinflated language. Like the hint of Aeolian belching beneath his Eolian philosophy, or the inglorious harmony emitted by his seemingly sweet nightingale, the sonnet implies that Coleridge’s florid archaisms conceal an essential vulgarity.

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[18] *Poems*, i. p. 29.

[19] *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012), p. 410.

[20] Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub. Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind* (London: John Nutt, 1704), p. 153; Richard Matlak, 'Swift's Aeolists and Coleridge's Eolian Harp', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 20 (2002): p. 50.

[21] Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. E. Marrs, 3 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973-78), i. p. 12. Michael O'Neill and Charles Mahoney suggest that Coleridge's inclusion of Sara's mild reproof contains an essential 'element of self-mockery' in *Romantic Poetry, an Annotated Anthology*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Charles Mahoney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 177.

At the heart of Coleridge’s self-mockery, then, lies a fundamental awareness of his own pretension. He appears to feel as though his work, or at least some of it, is merely a deceptive façade disguising an inherent lack of true inspiration and originality. The sonnet not only conveys this self-criticism in its incongruous archaic diction (falsely claiming the language of past poets whose ‘fame is established’, as Coleridge puts it in his 1797 *Poems* preface), but it does so by mimicking a specific instance of Coleridge’s poetic unoriginality: ‘Effusion XXIX’.[23] Subtitled ‘imitated from Ossian’, the poem was first published in the 1796 *Poems* volume (although Mays speculates that it had been composed as early as 1793).[24] It depicts a ‘Maiden’ and a ‘Travell’r’ who ‘vainly roam’ through a ‘dreary vale [...] In Slumber’s nightly hour’, in a manner that (as the subtitle suggests) draws directly from Ossian, and specifically his ‘Berrathon’ (published in *The Works of Ossian* in 1765).[25] Like the ‘Effusion’, ‘Berrathon’ features a ‘traveller’ and a maiden roaming through a vale by moonlight, and contains in its first paragraph a line replicated verbatim by Coleridge: ‘tomorrow shall the traveller come’.[26]

The third Higginbottom sonnet bears a significant resemblance to ‘Effusion XXIX’. Both recount the story of a man and a woman who forlornly ‘haunt’ a ‘dale’ (‘vale’ in the ‘Effusion’), both use archaic

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[22] See for instance Mark L. Barr’s argument that Sara is ‘reining in what might have become an extended idolatrous transgression’, in Mark L. Barr, ‘The Lyric Dispensation: Coleridge, Mosaic Law, and Equivocal Authority in “The Eolian Harp”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 44 (2005): p. 311.

[23] Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects*, pp. 84-85.

[24] *Poems*, i. p. 91.

[25] James Macpherson, *The Works of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London: T. Becket and P. A. Dehondt 1765), p. 356.

[26] Macpherson, *The Works of Ossian, the Son of Fingal*, p. 356; Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects*, pp. 85.

Ossianic diction (‘wonted’, for example, in the ‘Effusion’), and both close with a metaphorical comparison with the moon. However, where the speaker of the ‘Effusion’ attempts poetic sublimity (describing ‘the Moon-beam of thy soul’), Higginbottom reduces the metaphor to profane euphemism.[27] His parodic mockery of Coleridge’s own youthful imitations from other poets echoes similar jokes made in his correspondence. Later glossing his poem ‘In the Manner of Spenser’ (published in the 1797 *Poems*), for instance, Coleridge would label it ‘Little Potatoes in the *Manner* of the Pine-Apple’.[28] The line reveals a fundamental sense of embarrassment about the extent to which his poetry was unduly influenced by, and indeed had borrowed directly from, other poets. It is a self-critique that points towards the true target of the third Higginbottom sonnet. Though on the face of it the poem appears to mock his unnecessarily elaborate and incongruous diction, the root fault implicated by this mockery is an excessive reliance upon other writers.

Once this significance is discerned, the third sonnet begins to look less different to the rigorous mockery of Lloyd (and to a lesser extent Lamb) in the first two. The flaws they isolate in the two poets may similarly be traced back to an excessive reliance on others, and specifically on Coleridge himself. Lloyd in particular (as Fulford’s account of his ‘clinging neediness’ suggests) looked up to and emulated his mentor to an almost excessive degree. ‘My COLERIDGE!’, one *Poems* piece proclaims,

> take the wanderer to thy breast,
> The youth who loves thee, and who faint would rest
> (Oft rack’d by hopes that frensy and expire)
> In the long sabbath of subdued desire.[29]

This almost obsessive attachment is reflected in the elements of Lloyd’s poetic style that Higginbottom mocks. The perfunctory extension of words to fill metrical cadences (singled out for instance in the first sonnet’s use of the word ‘paly’) was not just a feature of Lloyd’s verse, but also appears frequently in

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[27] Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects*, pp. 84-85; *Poems*, i. p. 357.

[28] *Poems*, i. p. 225.

[29] Fulford, *Romantic Poetry and Literary Coteries*, p. 42; Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 181.

Coleridge's.[30] 'Doleful egotism', though not a central feature of Coleridge's poetry (at least not in the same way as it is for Lloyd), was similarly a failing to which he was not immune. He spends a large portion of the preface to the 1796 *Poems* volume anticipating and defending himself against just such a charge (namely 'querulous egotism', as he puts it), and clearly felt that this was a quality that might attract criticism in his work.[31] Given Lloyd's admiration for Coleridge, it is certainly possible that he felt in effect sanctioned to indulge in these habits by the authority of his friend and tutor.

Even simplicity, which Coleridge himself finds lacking in his own poetry, could be seen as sanctioned in a similar way.[32] He had, after all, deliberately promoted the benefits of a simple way of life to Lloyd, as he informs his father in a letter of late 1796 that describes the 'process of simplification' he had invited his son to adopt.[33] This simplification extended to Lloyd's speech and writing, which Coleridge found restricted and artificial (due to his 'habitually suppressing his Feelings'), and which he encouraged Lloyd to return to its natural 'Simplicity'.[34] Lloyd's poetry, in turn, adopts this advice in typically excessive style, reiterating his fondness for 'the pure pleasures of our simple cell' in pervasive celebrations of simplicity.[35] The overreliance on Coleridge's direction suggested by these ubiquitous debts goes some way towards explaining why Lloyd appears to attract the particular attention of the Higginbottom sonnets. What at first seems unwarranted and patronising mockery of a friend, begins to appear more a deliberate attempt to undermine or challenge Coleridge's own influence upon him. Rather than belittling and diminishing Lloyd's poetic ability, he in fact encourages him to seize his independence from what reviewers had labelled the 'Coleridgean school'.[36]

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[30] See for instance Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects*, p. 251.

[31] Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects*, p. v.

[32] He discerns such a lack in a letter to Thelwall of late 1796, which states: 'As to my own poetry I do confess that it frequently both in thought & language deviates from "nature & simplicity"'. *CL*, i. p. 278.

[33] *CL*, i. p. 264.

[34] *CL*, i. p. 237.

[35] Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd, *Poems*, p. 179.

[36] This epithet was given in *The Monthly Visitor, and Pocket Companion*, 9 vols (London: H. D. Symonds, 1797-1800), ii. p. 180.

Parody provides the perfect means for making this case, because it is itself, by definition, reliant upon other works. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, ‘*par*ody and *para*site do not share their Greek root (meaning either “beside” or “against”) for nothing. In a very literal sense, parodies live off other texts’.[37] By composing the Higginbottom sonnets as parodies (a mode Coleridge rarely used elsewhere at this time), rather than more direct satirical denunciations, he harnesses this quality to underline his fundamental point. Just as the sonnets imitate and exaggerate features of their source texts to reveal their ridiculousness, so those very source texts themselves are guilty of the same fault. In late 1802, Coleridge affirmed such a strategy in principle in an entry in his notebook. ‘Parodies on new Poems are a Ridicule’, he writes, ‘on old ones a Compliment’.[38] Implying that satiric parody and admiring imitation are simply two sides of the same coin, the comment echoes the approach he had taken as Nehemiah Higginbottom five years before. Mimicking what are already imitative works, the sonnets intimate that their targets are in effect parodies themselves already, rather than genuine original poetry.

This is not to say that Coleridge took no pleasure in the act of parodying. However constructive his intention to point out unoriginality may have been, it is difficult to believe that he did not sense he was committing something of a breach of trust (especially given the extent of the offence ultimately caused by the sonnets). Here, perhaps more strongly than anywhere else in the 1790s, it is possible to discern the mischievous instinct to satirise hinted at in his 1794 letters. At the same time, however, he appears to make a continued effort to check the vindictiveness of satire, and to turn it to more positive uses. Though the sonnets do provoke laughter at others’ expense, it becomes increasingly clear that the fundamental target beneath this mockery is in fact Coleridge himself. By censuring his own influence, he not only dampens with self-critique what would otherwise have been an untempered outward attack, but he also uses satire to promote the principle at the core of earlier works like *The Watchman*: intellectual independence.

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[37] Linda Hutcheon, ‘Foreword’ to *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831*, ed. David A. Kent and D. R. Ewen (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 8.

[38] *CN*, i. 463.

The choice of pseudonym succinctly reflects this aim. In February 1796, the first issue of the *Monthly Magazine* contained an article on the life of Nehemiah, the biblical governor of Judea.[39] 'NEHEMIAH ranks among the great characters of antient history', it begins;

> He forsook a place of influence at the most splendid court of Asia, to encounter every hardship, for the purpose of bestowing independence upon a horde of poor, ignorant, and wretched slaves.[40]

Whether prompted by this piece (in the very magazine in which the sonnets themselves would later be published), or by his own recollection of the figure, Coleridge's choice is certainly a suggestive one. Nehemiah, as the *Monthly* notes, organised the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, giving the Jews safety and independence from the corruptive influence of the surrounding peoples. As Nehemiah Higginbottom, Coleridge similarly pushes his friends towards artistic independence, freeing them from the threat of his own poetic influence.

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[39] *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, 48 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1796-1819), i. p. 12.
[40] *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, 48 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1796-1819), i. p. 12.

Part Two:
Morning Post

Chapter Four: Hired Scribbler

The Higginbottom sonnets round off Part One's account of Coleridge's satirical development between 1795 and 1797 by revealing an increasing comfort with its potentially morally harmful qualities, and a weakening inclination to change readers' minds about that harmfulness. Where his early prose actively warns about the dangers of satirical 'revenge', the Higginbottom sonnets, despite the underlying subtleties of their message, indulge to a far greater degree in the kind of personal ridicule Coleridge had so carefully resisted only a few years before. Chapter Three has suggested that this shift is the product of Coleridge's changing conception of his public role. No longer seeking to reform public morals directly by preaching principles to the people (as he does in 'Conciones ad Populum'), Coleridge appears to feel more free to compromise on the attitudes he had previously promoted, producing satire that at least on the face of it dabbles in the kind of direct and personal mockery he had once warned against.

The satirical pieces he contributed to the *Morning Post*, from late 1797 onwards, may be seen as a product of this compromise. Writing to Josiah Wedgwood in early 1798, Coleridge justifies his decision to join the paper by explaining the unavoidable nature of compromising on one's principles. Though the contemporary press is, he acknowledges, filled with prejudiced 'party politics' and 'gypsie jargon', it is better to improve what one can than to retreat from society altogether. 'To preserve therefore our moral feelings', he writes,

> without withdrawing ourselves from active life we should, I imagine, endeavor to discover those evils in society which are the most pressing, and those of which the immediate Removal appears the most practicable.[1]

Where the morally questionable instinct behind the Higginbottom sonnets appears the product of unthinking impulsiveness, this comment suggests a more considered willingness to concede the purity of his moral standards. The implications of this change in perspective have a significant effect on the satire

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[1] *CL*, i. p. 364.

Coleridge published in the *Morning Post*. Formerly, works like *The Watchman* had contained few direct references to the popular satirical tropes of the day, and where such references were present they were consistently subverted and undermined (as for instance in the image of the gamecock in ‘War: A New Mode Recommended’).[2] The satirical elements of *The Watchman* are, as such, remarkably idiosyncratic and independent from the conventions and characteristics of contemporary satire. From the first pieces Coleridge produced for Daniel Stuart (the *Morning Post*’s editor), however, a closer alignment with current satirical motifs becomes visible.

Though she focuses on Coleridge’s poetic contributions more generally (starting from 1799), and not specifically on his satire, Heidi Thomson also discerns an alignment of this sort. Following Paul Magnuson’s assertion that ‘without precise location, there is no cultural significance’, she argues that Coleridge’s *Morning Post* poems can only be fully understood when viewed in the immediate context for which they were written. The ‘newspaper versions of Coleridge’s poems’, she writes, are ‘accompanied by, or surrounded by, materials which provide a fascinating insight into the[ir] possible significance’.[3] Her analysis suggests that Coleridge’s poems of this period reveal a thoughtful engagement with, rather than an attempt to criticise and rise above, the social context in which he was publishing. Unlike the aloof censure of a poem like ‘The Raven’, written in the immediate wake of his retirement from his public role, Coleridge’s *Morning Post* poems draw from and respond to his fellow contributors, revealing a new attempt to embed himself within ‘active life’.

Satire lends itself to this form of engagement more than most genre. Discussing its inherent referentiality, Dustin Griffin stresses that satirical writing cannot be self-sufficient. Satires, he writes, ‘entice us to identify the masked targets and to apply the conclusions to the external world we live in. We supply those names and events from our stock of information about the “real world”’.[4] Until his engagement with the *Morning Post*, Coleridge had attempted to challenge and subvert this referentiality.

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[2] *TW*, pp. 275-6.
[3] Thompson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 5.
[4] Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, p. 120.

By borrowing satirical tropes with specific connotations, particularly those of radical satire, he led readers to draw a certain set of real-world conclusions about his underlying targets, only to tear away the curtain at the last moment and expose the inherent prejudice of those assumptions. Writing for Stuart, however, this overt subversion was harder to achieve.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, he had to satisfy his publisher by, as he puts it, ‘harmoniz[ing] with the tastes’ of the newspaper’s readership (a necessity that resulted in a sense that he had become merely a ‘hired paragraph-scribbler’).[5] Secondly, he did not have the luxury of choosing the context in which his contributions would appear, and so could not frame the reception of his jokes, as he had done in for instance *The Watchman*, by placing them within broader intertextual narratives. The result is a set of satires that participate more closely in the world of contemporary satirical writing and pay close attention to the immediate context of the *Morning Post* issues in which they were published. Focusing in particular on ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ and ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, this chapter explores Coleridge’s interaction with the satirical context and political climate in which he found himself, arguing that the close of 1797 marks the start of an increasingly collaborative approach to satire.

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[5] *CL*, i. pp. 627, 365.

4.1

In late November 1797, just as Coleridge began his engagement with the *Morning Post*, the Pitt administration put forward a bill that would treble the so-called Assessed Taxes, dramatically increasing the existing wartime levies in place on everything from windows to servants and carriages.[1] The move rallied the oppositional press, contributing significantly to what David Erdman describes as a ‘renewed Jacobinism of tone’ towards the end of 1797, and re-energising the satirical attacks upon the government printed in broadly anti-ministerial newspapers like the *Morning Post* and the *Morning Chronicle* (which this section will explore).[2] Given this context, it is unsurprising that Coleridge chose to address the issue in the first pieces of satire he produced for the *Morning Post* after being engaged by Stuart. The tone of these works, particularly ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ and ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, marks a striking departure from the generally critical stance Coleridge had taken towards contemporary satire over the previous years. Where 1796 works like ‘The Raven’ and *The Watchman* had found fault with the thoughtless prejudice of popular satirical motifs, Coleridge’s 1797 satire for the *Morning Post* reveals a surprising alignment with commonplace contemporary lines of satirical attack.

This section examines why this is the case, considering how Coleridge’s contract with the *Post* affected his satirical response to the actions of the Pitt administration, and particularly to the proposed rise in the Assessed Taxes. In order to do so, it will place Coleridge’s work in the context of the political satire contemporarily printed in the *Morning Post* (as well as that of other newspapers both oppositional and ministerial). Mary Robinson’s satirical pieces for Stuart, many of which touched on contemporary issues like the Assessed Taxes, will form a central part of this contextualisation. Her *Morning Post* poetry, alongside that of her fellow satirists at the newspaper, provides a means of gauging the extent to which

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[1] See Richard Cooper, ‘William Pitt, Taxation, and the Needs of War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 22 (1982): p. 94. Cooper also discusses how the increase was not always a straightforward trebling, but in some cases was as much as four times the amount previously paid.

[2] *EOT*, i. p. lxxv. Stamp duty on newspapers had been put up on 26 April that year: see John Jeffrey-Cook, ‘William Pitt and his Taxes’, *British Tax Review*, 4 (2010): p. 386.

Coleridge is deliberately emulating contemporary satire. If he is, then deeper questions must be asked about how far his attitude to satire had changed, and what he believes it is capable of achieving in the context of a newspaper like the *Morning Post*, both with regard to its readership and to government policy.

The significance of the government's proposal to raise the Assessed Taxes, tabled on 24 November 1797, was instantly recognised by the national press. The *Times*, for instance, printed the news on the front page of its 25 November issue, in place of its customary advertisements.[3] The overtly ministerial *True Briton* similarly gave prominence to the news, reporting widely on the hike, and seeking in its editorials to provide a justification. 'It will give more *stability to our National Credit*', the *True Briton* declared on 28 November,

> than has ever belonged to it [by proposing] a Contribution diffused over almost all the Classes of the Country who are above a state of poverty. [...] The scale will be peculiarly favourable to those who contribute only to Taxes of Necessity, and heaviest on articles of Luxury and Convenience; [giving] effectual relief, in all cases where the application of the General Rule might otherwise be attended with hardship.[4]

The passage addresses mounting contemporary concern, voiced for instance by George Tierney (then leader of the Whigs), that the trebled Taxes 'would be adding burthens on the poor and middling classes' more than on the rich.[5] As an organ of the ministry, the *True Briton*'s stress upon the equitable 'diffus[ion]' of the Taxes, and their allowances for the relief of 'hardship', serve as a loyalist retort to Tierney and the opposition's vocal critiques.[6]

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[3] *The Times* [London], 25 Nov. 1797, p. 1. The Times Digital Archive, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/CS16914809/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=029cae24. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[4] 'Finance.' *True Briton* [London], 28 Nov. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2001569818/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=cbf7c530. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[5] 'Proceedings in Parliament', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 302 vols (London: John Nichols, Chatto & Windus, etc., 1731-1907), lxxxiii. p. 307.

[6] *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), p. 603.

The *Morning Post* firmly positioned itself alongside the opposition in its response to such defences of the Taxes. On 29 November an editorial asserted that

> Mr. Pitt's Triple Assessment, as being *directly* laid on the rich, it is said, will not affect the poor. What idle sophistry! It will injure several branches of manufacture, it will turn thousands of servants out of place, its *indirect* operation will be felt through every class of society.[7]

The argument neatly exposes the evasiveness of the pro-government newspapers, which, the *Post* writer argues, neglect to mention the Taxes' accompanying consequences. Dror Wahrman has shown how such arguments reveal the extent of the polarisation of the contemporary press, and the pronounced and 'readily identifiable' divide in the rhetoric used by opposition and ministerial newspapers.[8] Publications in the former category, like the *Morning Post*, laid a heavy emphasis upon class-based inequality, and the particular severity with which the Taxes would affect the lower and middle classes (many of whose livelihoods, as in the case of merchants or servants, depended upon what the government had dismissed as 'luxuries'). Ministerial newspapers, by contrast, sought to downplay this focus on class, for instance modifying specific mentions of the poor or the middle class in parliamentary debates to 'some classes of men', and stressing the equal distribution of the fiscal burden.[9] In this way the Assessed Taxes laid bare the underlying divisions between pro- and anti-government newspapers at the end of 1797, and the extent to which they began to identify with particular rhetorical motifs and arguments.

Satire played a conspicuous role in shaping this discourse, highlighting, on the anti-government side, what was felt to be the disingenuous nature of the administration's (and loyalist publications') attempts to soften or dismiss the perceived injustice of the Taxes. On 12 December, for instance, the *Morning Post* contained a squib entitled 'A Radical Cure', which suggested that

> there's kindness in BILLY'S proposal, I think,

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[7] *Morning Post* [London], 29 Nov. 1797, p. 2. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975368/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=e36eaef9. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[8] Dror Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', *Past & Present*, 136 (1992): p. 98.

[9] See Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', p. 98.

> [...] for by taxing us double,
> We'll soon be depriv'd of cloaths, victuals, and drink,
> And that's the short way, Sir, of *ending our trouble*.[10]

The piece sarcastically echoes defences of the Taxes (also known as the Double Assessment, due to differences in the levies on various items) in the *True Briton*, which, as discussed above, had emphasised the 'effectual relief' they would give to the poor.[11] Such pieces signalled the periodical's critical tone with regard to the Assessed Taxes (and their defenders), one also evident in squibs like 'Wrong Names!' (printed in the issue of 29 November), which makes a similar point about the frequent mislabelling and misrepresentation of the Taxes.[12]

Coleridge's 'Parliamentary Oscillators', printed in the *Morning Post* on 30 December, reveals an inherent kinship with this satirical verse. Similarly taking aim at the Assessed Taxes Bill, Coleridge picks up the opposition's accusations of their unjustly punitive nature, condemning the parliamentary bill in question as 'ravenous', echoing fears that it would take 'victuals, and drink' from the needy.[13] He also reflects contemporary condemnations of the 'idle sophistry' and calculated misdirection of the bill's supporters.[14] Just as editorials and squibs in the *Morning Post* had mocked the government, and newspapers like the *True Briton*, for obscuring the Taxes' '*indirect* operation' (in order to suggest that

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[10] 'A Radical Cure.' *Morning Post* [London], 12 Dec. 1797, p. 3. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975488/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=251ccc2a. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[11] 'Finance.' p. 3.

[12] This is not to say that the *Morning Post* had a rigid editorial bias. There are one or two instances of poems with a general tone of support for the government, although these usually take the form of defences of the war (for instance 'A Caution to the French', printed on 28 November), and they never directly support the Taxes. Broadly, satirical pieces like 'A Radical Cure' and 'Wrong Names!' followed similar lines of attack (with focuses on government misrepresentation and injustice) in addressing the Assessed Taxes, the central issue of the day. 'A Caution to the French.' *Morning Post* [London], Nov. 28, 1797, p. 3. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975355/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=8f15c2db. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; 'Wrong Names!' *Morning Post* [London], 29 Nov. 1797, p. 2. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975368/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=e36eaef9. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[13] 38 Geo. 3 c.16. (*Poems*, i. p. 421); 'A Radical Cure', p. 3.

[14] *Morning Post* [London], 29 Nov. 1797, p. 2. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975368/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=e36eaef9. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

‘there’s kindness in BILLY’S proposal’), so Coleridge takes aim in ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ at the act of ‘smoothly glozing’ the bill.[15] This accusation of sly glossing, or deliberate obfuscation, perfectly fits with the kinds of attacks that were contemporarily being published by Daniel Stuart. It suggests an attempt on Coleridge’s part to cohere with the wider political message of the publication for which he was writing.

Yet Coleridge also develops the newspaper’s strategy. Rather than targeting the decision to raise the Taxes, as the other *Morning Post* satires had done, he chooses instead to attack the traditionally loyal supporters of Pitt who wavered in their support for the government as a result of the policy. His title immediately makes this new focus clear, addressing the poem

> To Sir John Sinclair, Alderman Lushington, and the Whole Troop of Parliamentary Oscillators.[16]

Lushington and Sinclair had both spoken against the new Taxes in the Commons, having been ‘instructed by their constituents’ to do so (as the *Monthly Magazine* for December 1797 reported).[17] By narrowing the terms of his satire to target these specific individuals (and mocking the cowardice that a submission to Pitt would entail by comparing them to ‘chicken[s]’ and other animals), Coleridge appears to have in mind a more specific goal than that of his fellow satirists at the *Post*. The final votes on the bill had not yet taken place, and by putting pressure on Members of Parliament who had (or at least appeared to have) the potential to change their minds, ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ indicates a practical attempt to upset Pitt’s legislative agenda. Though these oscillators did not in the end oppose the bill in its later readings, the originality of the poem’s subject (when compared to others of the time) suggests more than what Carl Woodring describes as a ‘feeble [effort] to influence’ current affairs.[18] With its carefully chosen targets and its pragmatism, 'Parliamentary Oscillators' reveals an attempt to make a tangible difference to contemporary politics.

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[15] ‘A Radical Cure’, p. 3; *Poems*, i. p. 421.

[16] Cited in Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 45. When the poem was republished in the *Cambridge Intelligencer* the following week, Samuel Thornton (MP, and later Governor of the Bank of England) had been added to the list. *Cambridge Intelligencer*, 6 Jan. 1798, British Library MFM.M41259.

[17] *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, 48 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1796-1819), iv. p. 482.

[18] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 138.

In seeking to have this influence, it would not have been unreasonable for Coleridge to suppose that the satire might have been read by the very figures he addresses in his title. In a letter to Josiah Wedgwood of 1800, Coleridge admits his pleasure at hearing

> a favorite & often urged argument repeated almost in your own particular phrases in the House of Commons—& quietly in the silent self-complacence of your own Heart chuckl[ing] over the plagiarism, as if you were grand Monopolist of all good Reasons![19]

Though the letter was written several years after 'Parliamentary Oscillators', during Coleridge's stint as a parliamentary reporter, the comment does suggest something of the influence of the *Post* on contemporary politics.[20] Its circulation numbers had undergone a meteoric rise in the period immediately preceding (and also indeed following) Coleridge's acceptance of his position. Stuart's obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* details a rise from 350 issues sold per day on his purchasing of the paper in 1795, to 1000 in the spring of 1797, just a few months before the publication of 'Parliamentary Oscillators'.[21]

Given the success of the paper, Coleridge could at the very least have expected a wide and diverse readership amongst the general population. He was familiar with the tendency for less well-off individuals to club together to buy newspapers, having written about it in *The Watchman* with specific reference to 'The institution of large manufactories; in many of which it is the custom for a newspaper to be regularly read'.[22] As such, Coleridge could have expected his satire to have been read by everyone from MPs to factory labourers. In light of this fact, he may well have sought, if not to influence Lushington and Sinclair, then at least to spur on the public at large, and specifically the oscillators' vocal constituents (as the *Monthly Magazine* had painted them) in their protestations.[23] Thus if 'Parliamentary Oscillators' was intended to affect the behaviour of its targets, then there was certainly a feasible means by which it could achieve this aim.

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[19] *CL*, i. p. 569.

[20] *EOT*, i. p. xciii.

[21] 'Obit. — Daniel Stuart Esq.', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 302 vols (London: D. Henry, E. Cave, John Bowyer Nichols and Son, F. Jeffries, etc., 1731-1907 [1847]), ser. 2, xxvii. p. 91.

[22] *TW*, p. 13.

Read in this way, the poem displays a clear shift in Coleridge's approach to satire. As discussed in Chapter One, his comments about satire in 1794 and 1795 are intertwined with implications of its inherent 'petulance' and indeed malevolence, as a mode of writing that unthinkingly condemns perceived vice rather than encouraging the active 'contemplation of possible perfection'.[24] Chapter One argues that this negative conception of satire reveals the influence of Hartley's account of satire's lack of 'benevolence' in *Observations on Man* (and the broader tradition of eighteenth-century scepticism towards satire that this represents), but as 'Parliamentary Oscillators' shows, Coleridge does not appear to have maintained this Hartleian attitude for long. Written just two years after his negative comments about satire in 1795, 'Parliamentary Oscillators' indulges in exactly the kind of personal denunciation that Coleridge earlier criticises. In this sense it represents a natural development from the harsher satire of the Higginbottom sonnets, with Coleridge showing himself significantly less cautious about publishing direct and ad hominem satirical attacks along established party lines in service of a wider political objective.

From his correspondence of the time it is clear that Coleridge did feel a certain amount of pressure in his new role, pressure that might explain this shift. On 5 January 1798, a week after the publication of 'Parliamentary Oscillators', he informed Josiah Wedgwood that

> The few weeks that I have written for the Morning Post, I have felt this——Something must be written & written immediately— [...] if any idea of ludicrous personality, or apt antiministerial joke, crosses me, I feel a repugnance at rejecting it, because *something must be written* and nothing else suitable occurs.[25]

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[23] *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, 48 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1796-1819), iv. p. 482.
[24] *CL*, i. p. 65; *Lects 1795*, pp. 11-12.
[25] *CL*, i. p. 365.

Commenting on this statement, Angela Esterhammer suggests that it reveals how, for Coleridge, 'the pressure of writing to deadline necessitates an adjustment to a new mode of composition, one that tempts the writer to choose shallow humour and pettiness over intellect and truth'.[26] Esterhammer's contention that this letter points to a process of adjustment within Coleridge's writing is a convincing one, but the paragraph in question, which provides several indications as to how this process was conducted, reveals a little more than Esterhammer's suggestion of an involuntary indulgence in 'shallow humour'.

As far as 'Parliamentary Oscillators' is concerned, Coleridge's use of the words 'apt' and 'suitable' are of particular significance. They suggest that, to Coleridge's mind, the natural consequence of the strain he was experiencing at the *Post* was not pettiness so much as conformity. It is this tendency towards conformity that helps to decode the images he makes use of in satirising the oscillators, and that is particularly visible in the description of their oscillating relationship to Pitt in the fifth stanza. Here Coleridge states that he 'admire[s], no more than Mr. Pitt, / Your jumps and starts of patriotic prosing',

> Now having faith implicit that he can't err,
> Hoping his hopes, alarm'd with this alarms;
> And now believing him a sly inchanter,
> Yet still afraid to break his brittle charms.[27]

In the somewhat contrived double-rhyme between 'inchanter' and 'can't err', the stanza succinctly captures the childish and fickle nature of their vacillation. In addition to this, however, the lines derive much of their effect by conforming to a satirical trope that would have been immediately recognisable to a 1790s reader: that of Pitt represented as a magician.

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[26] Angela Esterhammer, 'Coleridge in the Newspapers, Periodicals, and Annuals', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 178. Charlotte Woods Glickfield (in 'Coleridge's Prose Contributions to the Morning Post', *PMLA*, 69 (1954): p.681) questions why Coleridge felt this pressure, despite having only contributed 'Parliamentary Oscillators' and two articles (*EOT*, i. pp. 7-11) by the time of the letter of 5 January. However, when written under pressure, even one piece could produce this sort of exasperation in Coleridge, as E. L. Griggs notes in '"The Friend:" 1809 and 1818 Editions', *Modern Philology*, 35 (1938): p. 369.

[27] *Poems*, i. p. 421.

In 1793, upon his return to England from France (where his writing had been celebrated by the French National Convention), the Della Cruscan poet Robert Merry produced a satirical handbill entitled *Signor Pittachio*.[28] The piece, which presents Pitt as a touring showman performing magic tricks and enchantments, reads as follows:

> WONDERFUL EXHIBITION!!!
> SIGNOR
> Guilemo Pittachio
> The SUBLIME WONDER of the World!!!
> *Condescends* to inform the Public at large, and his friends in particular, that he has now opened his Grand Hall of Exhibitions at Westminster, with a grand display of his
> ASTONISHING AND MAGNIFICENT DECEPTIONS;...
> First—The Signor will bring forward
> A Magical ALARM BELL,
> At the ringing of which all the Company will become mad or Foolish,
> Secondly he will produce his justly Celebrated CURIOUS SPY GLASSES,
> which distort all Objects that are looked at through them…
> Thirdly—by means of an ENCHANTED DRUM, he will set all the Company a FIGHTING, for the avowed Purpose of preserving
> ORDER AND TRANQUILITY.
> [...] In the Course of the Entertainment the Sublime Pittachio will exhibit
> UPWARDS OF TWO HUNDRED AUTOMATA, OR MOVING PUPPETS,
> who will rise up, sit down, say Yes, or No, Receive Money, Rake among the cinders, or do any Dirty Work he may think proper to put them to.[29]

The piece was immediately successful, inspiring numerous imitations in radical periodicals, including in Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People*.[30] For Marcus Wood, the reason for the handbill's success lies in its combination of both 'surprising delicacy' and occasional bouts of 'undisguised outrage' which '[break] through the surface'.[31] The transparent sarcasm of the italicised '*Condescends*', in the extract above, presents one such instance of outrage, containing within it a bitter accusation of superciliousness, and a derisive tone that illustrates the *Monthly Magazine*'s description of the broadside (in Robert Merry's obituary) as 'a most happy production of keen satire'.[32]

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[28] Marcus Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture, 1790-1822* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 82-83.
[29] British Museum, Collection of Political and Personal Satires, no. 8500.
[30] *Politics for the People*, ii. pp. 406-07.
[31] Marcus Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture, 1790-1822* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.84. Wood also details the origins of the trope in Swift's use of mountebank imagery in the first Bickerstaff pamphlet (*Radical Satire*, p. 85)

Coleridge's use of the 'inchanter' image reveals a clear debt to this popular satirical trope. He casts Lushington and Sinclair in the role of the 'Automata' that Merry had earlier described, reusing the suggestion of magic to explain their subjugation to Pitt's wishes. In Coleridge's stanza, however, the oscillators are not under his spell in the same way that Pitt's placemen are in Merry's, instead only momentarily 'believ[ing] him a sly inchanter'. The implication is not just that they are either too cowardly or foolish to exercise their own agency, but also, crucially, that they have the power to do so if they so choose. Coleridge emphasises, where Merry does not, that they are capable of changing their beliefs and thus escaping Pitt's thrall. Here again Coleridge illustrates the practical focus of his satire: he mocks, but in mocking he also spurs his target into action, seeking to effect a tangible change in behaviour.

Coleridge was not, however, the first satirist in 1797 to adapt Merry's satire. In the 'renewed Jacobinism' of the latter portion of that year, the motif had been resurrected by other satirists at the *Morning Post*, most notably by Mary Robinson.[33] On 13 December, at exactly the time when Coleridge must have been writing, or considering writing, 'Parliamentary Oscillators' (for publication on 30 December), a poem entitled 'A Simple Tale' appeared in the *Post* under Robinson's pseudonym 'Tabitha Bramble'.[34] The poem recounts the story of a 'Conjurer' or 'JUGGLER' at a 'Village Fair', who uses 'wily tricks' and supposed '*black art*' to dupe the 'bumpkins' assembled before him into handing over their valuables, in the belief that he will turn them to gold. Though the reference to the Assessed Taxes is not made as explicit as in some of the other December satires discussed above, the relevance is nonetheless plain: Pitt's new Taxes are a ploy designed to swindle the population out of their money. Indeed, Robinson (or perhaps Stuart) goes as far as to include an asterisked note (to a line that mentions how the conjurer 'to gold would turn a *pig* of lead') that rules out, with a knowing wink, any 'allu[sion] to the *swinish multitude*'.[35] The note immediately flags up the anti-ministerial implications of the piece (for those who had not spotted them already), affirming the poem's debt to the radical swine-filled satire ubiquitous in the earlier years of the decade, and emphasising its place in a tradition already highlighted by the manifest influence of the *Signor Pittachio* trope (in the reference to Pitt as a 'Conjuror').

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[32] *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, 48 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1796-1819), vii. p. 257.

[33] *EOT*, i. p. lxxv. She and Coleridge had both been taken on by Stuart in November 1797. See Ashley Cross, 'Robert Southey and Mary Robinson in Dialogue', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42 (2011): p. 10.

[34] Tabitha Bramble, 'A Simple Tale.' *Morning Post* [London], 13 Dec. 1797, p. 3. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975368/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=e36eaef9. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

This conscious debt substantiates, to a certain extent, Daniel Robinson's critique of the series of satirical poems (of which 'A Simple Tale' forms a part) published by Mary Robinson under the pseudonym 'Tabitha Bramble' in the *Morning Post* between 1797 and 1798. '[P]erhaps more than any of her other poems', he writes, they 'seem hastily, even sloppily, composed and were probably written for immediate financial gain more than for any serious literary purpose'.[36] Yet whilst Mary Robinson's borrowing of the motif may perhaps be called derivative (and therefore 'hastily, even sloppily' unoriginal), its echoes of Merry also serve as a clear marker of political allegiance. By resurrecting standard images in the repertoire of radical satire, Robinson immediately establishes a distinct radicalism of tone.[37]

Coleridge's own reuse of the conjurer or 'inchanter' motif, in the immediate wake of Robinson's 'Simple Tale', can from one perspective be seen as another instance of his interaction with Robinson at the *Post*, a topic that has received considerable critical attention. E. L. Griggs, Tim Fulford, and more recently Heidi Thomson (to name but a few) have all discussed the differing implications that poems like 'The Snow Drop' have for Coleridge's relationship with Robinson, and his poetic development.[38] His adoption of her (in itself adopted) motif in 'Parliamentary Oscillators' could be read as another example of his being drawn to her poetry, and thus as a nod to the work of a poet whom he 'valued [...] greatly', as Thomson puts it.[39]

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[35] Tabitha Bramble, 'A Simple Tale.' p. 3.

[36] Daniel Robinson, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 170.

[37] Also see A. Craciun's brief discussion of the parallel with *Signor Pittachio*, in *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 78.

[38] Earl Leslie Griggs, 'Coleridge and Mrs. Mary Robinson', *Modern Language Notes*, 45 (1930): pp.90-95; Tim Fulford, 'Mary Robinson and the Abyssinian Maid: Coleridge's Muses and Feminist Criticism', *Romanticism on the Net*, 13 (1999): pp. 1-25; Chapters Six and Seven in Thomson's *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper* deal with Coleridge's relationship with Mary Robinson.

In December 1797, however, Coleridge had not yet met Robinson, and he may not even have known that she and Tabitha Bramble were one and the same person.[40] As such, it may plausibly be argued that friendly referentiality is not the most convincing explanation for the borrowings in 'Parliamentary Oscillators'. A different reading of the poem, bearing this in mind, would be to suggest that it indicates the impulse towards writing something 'apt' and 'suitable' that Coleridge describes in his letter to Josiah Wedgwood.[41] Indeed, given Coleridge's views on the vindictiveness of satire, and given the dissatisfaction with the piece implied in his letter to Wedgwood, conformity brought on by necessity might be seen as the more persuasive motivation behind the debt in 'Parliamentary Oscillators' to Robinson's satirising of Pitt.

Read in this way, as a resignation to the need for suitability, the debt suggests a consciousness of the processes of collective identity construction, elucidated by Judith Pascoe in *Romantic Theatricality*, that lay within the *Morning Post*'s poetry section. For Pascoe, 'The headnotes to the poems printed in [the *Morning Post*] bespeak a desire to fashion an audience sophisticated enough to appreciate the poetry's particular virtues'.[42] She illustrates this with the example of the note attached to Coleridge's 'Lewti' (published in the *Post* on 13 April 1798), which states that 'The fifth and last stanzas are, we think, the best'.[43] Such notes, Pascoe argues, 'suggest the existence of an exclusive club of discerning critics, one that the reader might be permitted to join'.[44] In making this claim, her argument owes much to Jon Klancher's influential study of *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832*, in which he similarly suggests (though without specific reference to the *Morning Post*) that 'Periodical texts [show] how "making audiences" meant evolving readers' interpretive frameworks and shaping their ideological awareness'.[45] By demonstrating how the *Post* ushers its readers into an 'exclusive club', Pascoe reveals how it conspicuously engages in this evolving of 'interpretive frameworks'. In so doing, the *Post* reveals a careful attempt to 'fashion an audience' (to use Pascoe's phrase), encouraging its diverse readers to think of themselves as part of a community defined by their sensitivity to poetic talent.[46]

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[39] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 135.

[40] Daniel Robinson discusses the date of their meeting, with reference to the testimony of Coleridge's friend Clement Carlyon, in *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 191. Paula Byrne argues that the two poets met as early as February 1796, in *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 321. With reference to Adam Sisman's and Pamela Clemit's own research on this issue, Daniel Robinson dismisses Byrne's claim as 'highly unlikely' (see *The Poetry of Mary Robinson*, p. 253).

[41] *CL*, i. p. 365.

[42] Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 166.

[43] 'Lewti; Or, The Circassian's Love Chant.' *Morning Post* [London], 13 Apr. 1798, p. 3. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000976466/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=04a9725f. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

Building on Pascoe's argument, Ashley Cross has more recently shown how the same process took place not just in poetic paratexts, but within the content of individual poems as well. Her case studies, both in *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism* and 'Robert Southey and Mary Robinson in Dialogue', focus on the poetic conversation encouraged by Daniel Stuart between these two poets (both of whom he had hired) within the pages of the *Morning Post*.[47] Cross illustrates how Robinson's 'The Doublet of Grey' was framed by Stuart (in February 1798) in terms of its responsiveness to Southey's 'Mary, the Maid of the Inn', 'not only in its employment of the same meter, but also in its relationship to earlier popular ballads and tales' like *The Monk*.[48] This poetic interaction, Cross argues, allowed Stuart 'to build a particular identity for his paper by linking Robinson and Southey and playing up their poetic genius'.[49] The *Post*'s exhibition and encouragement of poetic interaction and development allowed readers, much as Judith Pascoe suggests, to feel part of a community, collectively privy to an intimate exchange.

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[44] Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, p. 166.

[45] Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1987), p.4.

[46] Judith Pascoe, *Romantic*, p. 166.

[47] Ashley Cross, 'Robert Southey and Mary Robinson in Dialogue', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42 (2011): pp. 10-17; Ashley Cross, *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism: Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784-1821* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), from p. 83; Stuart Curran, in 'Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* in Context' (in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, eds. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), pp. 17-35), also makes this observation about their interaction, though his focus is not on the *Morning Post* but on Southey's eclogues, and as his title suggests, the *Lyrical Tales*.

[48] Cross, *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism*, p. 88.

[49] Cross, 'Robert Southey and Mary Robinson in Dialogue', p. 11.

Coleridge's development of Mary Robinson's use of the conjurer/enchanter motif (and indeed his development of the *Post*'s satirical response to the Assessed Taxes more generally) reveals how a similar process of communal identity construction was occurring in the *Post*'s satire. By taking up the image, Coleridge enters into a dialogue with Robinson's poem in much the same way that she herself does with Southey. In so doing, Coleridge writes his satire in a manner to which satire is particularly suited. As radical pamphleteers' adoption of Burke's 'swinish multitude' epithet had demonstrated, satirical metaphors could serve as a useful means of establishing, and rallying around, a collective identity. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. discusses how the motif (and the pamphleteers like Daniel Isaac Eaton and Thomas Spence who adopted it) 'creat[ed] new spaces for conversation and debate' within a striking and instantly recognisable framework.[50] Their 'satirical variations on Burke's theme', as E. P. Thompson puts it, evident in the many contributors to who signed themselves as 'Porculus' or 'Brother Grunter', instantly marked them out as part of a collective discourse defined by its anger at Burke's perceived dismissiveness, and the government's disregard for (and active frustration of) their concerns.[51] Coleridge's 'Parliamentary Oscillators', whilst a subtler satire than those of Porculus and Brother Grunter, is similar in this respect. He uses established satirical motifs to insert himself into an ongoing dialogue, one that lent the poetry section of the *Post* a recognisable character and consistency as part of the 'renewed Jacobinism of tone' spurred by the Assessed Taxes.

Whilst at the *Post*, then, Coleridge seems to suppress the distaste, evident in his earlier writing, for this approach to satire. Just as 'Parliamentary Oscillators' constitutes an ad hominem satirical attack of the kind he criticises in 1794 and 1795, so it also uses satirical motifs like the 'inchanter' image in spite of his critique of the overuse of satirical tropes in pieces like 'The Raven'. It perhaps makes sense to view this shift alongside other unexpected shifts and apparent incongruities in his behaviour, like the illiberal activities he participated in whilst serving as an assistant to the Civil Commissioner of Malta. In the introduction to Barry Hough's and Howard Davis's recent work on this period, Michael John Kooy describes 'Coleridge's willingness to assist in weakening the Rule of Law on Malta [which] constitutes a disturbing departure from the liberal idealism he espoused both before and after'.[52] If, as Hough and Davis suggest, Coleridge was capable of radical departures from previously strongly held views (when attempting to find his place in new institutions), 'Parliamentary Oscillators' would certainly appear to form another such departure. It is one that, as the next section will argue, was not a standalone moment in Coleridge's satirical development.

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[50] Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. '"A Story to be Gobbled Up": "Caleb Williams" and Print Culture', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32 (1993): p. 332.
[51] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 90.

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[52] Michael John Kooy, 'Introduction', to Barry Hough and Howard Davis, *Coleridge's Laws: A Study of Coleridge in Malta* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), p. xxiv.

4.2

Discussing ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ in a letter to Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes groups it with ‘Coleridge’s doggerel, witch-dance howl, The Raven’, and discerns a ‘contrabasso belly laugh throughout’.[1] It is certainly a strangely forceful piece, one that goes considerably further than ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ (printed the week before) in its attack upon the character of the Prime Minister. Yet a direct comparison with ‘The Raven’ overlooks the fundamental differences between the approaches to satire in the two pieces. This section will suggest that, when considered in the context of contemporary satire, ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ has more in common with ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ than with ‘The Raven’, in that, like ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, it conspicuously coheres with and develops common satirical tropes of the time. These underlying elements of coherence with contemporary satire will be shown to be strikingly at odds with Coleridge’s previous satirical writing (and writing about satire), ultimately producing a different effect from that of ‘The Raven’.

As far as subject matter is concerned, Coleridge’s focus in ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ does not initially appear to be in keeping with that of his contemporaries. In the weeks immediately preceding its publication on 8 January 1798, the *Post*’s other satirists were still by and large focusing on current issues, particularly the Assessed Taxes and the protracted war with France.[2] Coleridge, by contrast, opens his piece with a stage direction that draws attention to the poem’s apparent untimeliness: ‘SCENE—A depopulated tract in La Vendee’.[3] The revolt in La Vendée in western France had occurred in 1793, and Coleridge’s poem reiterates an old accusation that the Pitt administration had played a key role in instigating it, an accusation he had first levelled over two years earlier in *Conciones ad Populum*. 'By the internal disturbances of France', Coleridge then wrote,

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[1] Ted Hughes to Seamus Heaney, 24 Jan. 1994: *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 660-61.

[2] See for instance the satires and epigrams published in the *Morning Post* on 4 Jan. 1798, among which three of four attack the Taxes and the war (not including Coleridge’s ‘To a well-known Musical Critic, remarkable for his ears sticking thro' his hair’, also published that day, and discussed in Chapter Six). The remaining epigram laments the fact that ‘damsels [...] are thinking of nothing but love’.

[3] *Poems*, i. p. 440.

> in La Vendee and other places, disturbances excited by English agents, and rendered obstinate by our Ministers' promises, more than *Three Hundred Thousand* have been butchered.[4]

The piece refers to reports that the Pitt ministry had encouraged loyalist citizens in La Vendée, under the leadership of Henri de la Rochejaquelein (an aristocrat, and the son of the Marquis de La Rochejaquelein), to rebel against the republicans.[5] The Commune and the Committee of Public Safety responded by sending the republican army into La Vendée in order to crush the revolt, a task they reportedly went about with brutality.[6] As the revolt was reaching its climax, however, the ministry's attention was diverted elsewhere (partly to the Siege of Toulon, which began in August, 1793), and consequently British reinforcements were not forthcoming, despite a prior agreement to that effect.[7] The bloody suppression of the revolt which ensued was heavily criticised in Parliament and in the British press, with blame 'for the poor timing and ineptitude of the intervention in the Vendée' being laid squarely at Pitt's door.[8]

Coleridge's poem about this event describes an allegorical encounter between the three furies (or figures reminiscent of furies) named in its title. They describe to one another various bloody scenes of battle, celebrating (with impassioned descriptions of death and destruction) the suffering they have caused, and asking 'How shall we yield [...] honour due' to their unnamed master.[9] The only hint given about the identity of this figure is that 'Letters four do form his name', but although this leaves Coleridge enough room for plausible deniability (and the defence that his implication had been the devil, or 'Old Nick', who also appears in his contemporary poem 'The Story of the Mad Ox'), Coleridge could have been certain that 'Pitt' would be the first four-letter name that would come to contemporary readers' minds.[10] Given the context of the blame placed on Pitt by his opponents for the events of La Vendée, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' plainly harks back to old criticisms of Pitt's actions in 1793.

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[4] *Lects 1795*, p. 59.

[5] Jennifer Mori, 'The British Government and the Bourbon Restoration: The Occupation of Toulon, 1793', *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997): p. 705.

[6] François Furet, 'Vendée', in *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, eds. Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 167.

[7] Mori, 'The British Government and the Bourbon Restoration', p. 706.

[8] See Anya Taylor who refers to this in connection to the Parliamentary debate 'on the Causes of the Failure at Dunkirk' (in 'Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, Slaughter": The Vendée, Rage, and Hypostasized Allegory', *European Romantic Review*, 21 (2010): p. 713). See also *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London: T. C. Hansard, 1806-20), xxi, p. 237.

[9] *Poems*, i. p. 443.

There are several reasons why Coleridge might have wanted to return to the matter at the turn of 1798. Anya Taylor, in her detailed analysis of the poem, situates 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' in a line of comments Coleridge had made about La Vendée since 1795. In the issue of *The Watchman* for 17 March 1796, for instance, Coleridge asserts that 'SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND FRENCHMEN HAVE PERISHED IN LA VENDEE!', doubling the 300,000 figure he gives in *Conciones*. Taylor points out that, in 1798's 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', the number has been increased again to 'thrice three hundred thousand men', which leads her to suggest that, by returning to and amplifying the issue repeatedly, Coleridge is seeking to mount pressure upon Pitt's 'continuing justification of his policy on the need for "Security" despite the absence of any attack'.[11]

Viewed with this in mind, Fire's mention of Ireland halfway through the poem further explains Coleridge's return to the issue of La Vendée at the turn of 1798. Responding to Famine's cryptic reference to the spelling of Pitt's name, Fire announces:

> Sisters! I from Ireland came!
> Hedge and corn-fields all on flame
> I triumphed o'er the setting sun![12]

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[10] *Poems*, i. p. 507.

[11] *Poems,* i. p. 441; Anya Taylor, 'Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, Slaughter": The Vendée, Rage, and Hypostasized Allegory', p. 714-15. Taylor suggests that the poem may have been written in 1796 (with the mention of Ireland added before publication in 1798), and thus that it comes straight out of the anger Coleridge was expressing in 1796 about the lingering violence and devastation still ongoing in La Vendée. Lewis Patton, however, believes that the poem was written in December 1797, immediately before its publication on 8 January 1798. The issue of dating will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

[12] *Poems*, i. p. 443.

The French had attempted unsuccessfully to land in Ireland in late 1796, with the intention of using it as a staging-post for a future invasion of Great Britain. News then reached Westminster of the plans of the United Irishmen (who had been in contact with the French) to mobilise an army either to rebel or to aid a future French invasion.[13] This led the Pitt administration to send General Lake to rally the Protestant militias in order to suppress the rebels, which they did violently (as Michael Tomko and E. A. Smith detail).[14] By linking Pitt's current policy in Ireland with his activities in La Vendée, Coleridge uses the earlier event to construct a narrative that succinctly condemns his unwarranted (given, as Taylor puts it, 'the absence of any attack') militancy and hawkishness.[15]

A more immediate factor behind Coleridge's choice of subject matter, and one not mentioned by Taylor in her study, could be the recent death (on 19 September 1797) of Lazare Hoche, the general who had led the revolutionary army's suppression of the revolt. Reporting his death on 29 September 1797, the *True Briton* mentions contemporary suspicions of foul-play. 'General HOCHE died at his Head-quarters at *Wetzlaer*', the article reads,

> on the 18th inst. Such an event, at a period when he had borne so distinguished a part in the political transactions of the French Republic, very naturally gave rise to suspicions—and some of the Journalists intimated their doubts that he had been poisoned.[16]

Although Hoche had in reality died of tuberculosis, the suspicion of poisoning kept the issue in the press for weeks to come.[17] Many of the newspaper reports on the topic, especially those in the *True Briton*, frequently reiterated their condemnations of his actions in La Vendée, often doing so in impassioned language reminiscent of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’. One report in the *True Briton*, for instance, describes ‘his *butcheries* in *La Vendée*, where he spared neither sex nor age’, whilst another describes him as an ‘assassin’, and ‘a wretch stained with blood from head to foot’.[18] Coleridge’s heightened accounts of Slaughter ‘[drinking] blood’, or Famine rattling ‘bones and skulls’, certainly echo something of the intensity of these reports of the same event. If Coleridge is echoing or referencing such reports, ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ could be read as a kind of oppositionist response to these recent ministerial condemnations of Hoche, arguing that Pitt had just as much responsibility for the atrocities. Whether or not such an explicit echo lies behind ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, Hoche’s recent death certainly at least points towards an additional reason for Coleridge’s return to the subject of La Vendée at the end of 1797.

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[13] Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778-1829* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 25; E. A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), p. 83.

[14] Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question*, p. 25; Smith, *George IV*, p. 83.

[15] Taylor, 'Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, Slaughter": The Vendée, Rage, and Hypostasized Allegory', p. 715. The parallel also explains why the column beside 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' in the *Morning Post* for 8 Jan. 1798, which contained Arthur O'Connell's 'Address to the Irish Nation', similarly describes the atrocities of La Vendée (discussed further in Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', p. 286).

[16] *True Briton* [London], 29 Sept. 1797, p. 2. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2001568752/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=fb61fb9d. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[17] James Kelly, 'Official List of Radical Activists and Suspected Activists Involved in Emmet's Rebellion, 1803', *Analecta Hibernica*, 43 (2012): p. 179.

Regardless of the influence of contemporary newspaper rhetoric, the tone of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ is considerably more violent than that of much of Coleridge’s previous satirical writing. The poem is full of gruesome accounts of how Slaughter, for instance, ‘drank the blood [...] / Of thrice three hundred thousand men’, or of Famine observing how ‘A baby beat its dying mother: / I had starved the one and was starving the other!’.[19] Ultimate responsibility for each of these scenes is laid at the feet of the mysterious four-lettered figure, who ‘came by stealth’ and set the three furies free. For both Morton Paley and Sally West, these ‘barely concealed allusion[s]’ to Pitt serve ‘not to obscure but to identify’, and indeed to ‘intensif[y] the bite of his satire’.[20] Indeed it is this reading of the poem, as a biting vitriolic attack upon the Prime Minister, that Coleridge explicitly seeks to apologise for and exonerate himself from in the 'Apologetic Preface' he added to the poem in *Sibylline Leaves*. Here Coleridge asserts that

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[18] *True Briton* [London], 4 Oct. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2001568832/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=4618076e. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; *True Briton* [London], 14 Sept. 1797, p. 2. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2001568488/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=16e40691. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[19] *Poems*, i. p. 442. This image also appears in *Osorio*, in which Alhadra describes her infant starving in her arms. Clearly the image was an affecting one for Coleridge, perhaps because of his financial difficulties (contemporary letters point to his worries about providing for his family). S. T. Coleridge, *Plays*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 16.3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), i. p. 72 (hereafter cited as *Plays*); e.g. *CL*, i. p. 349.

[20] Sally West, *Coleridge and Shelley: Textual Engagement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 29; Morton D. Paley, ‘Coleridge and the Apocalyptic Grotesque’, in *Coleridge's Visionary Languages*, eds. Tim Fulford and Morton D. Paley (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p.16.

> so far was I even then from imagining that the lines would be taken as more or less than a sport of fancy. At all events, if I know my own heart, there was never a moment in my existence in which I should have been more ready, had Mr. Pitt's person been in hazard, to interpose my own body, and defend his life at the risk of my own.[21]

That Coleridge felt the need to append this preface reveals much about the uncharacteristic severity of the poem's attack. To his mind, it seems, the vitriol of 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' needed special justification, whereas other satires, like 'Parliamentary Oscillators' (republished in *Sibylline Leaves* with no such preface) did not.[22]

'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' is, in this sense, the most Juvenalian of Coleridge's satirical poems (although at no point does he categorise it in these terms, as the next section will explore further). Indeed, when discussing typical examples of late-Georgian satire (in her general essay on 'Satire' in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*), Ashley Marshall mentions 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' in particular as a notable instance of 'neo-Juvenalian' satire in the 1790s, whilst Andrew Stauffer argues that Juvenalian indignation 'resonates strongly' through it.[23] Over the course of the eighteenth century, Juvenalian satire had been increasingly defined against the playful ambivalence of Horatian satire, and by the 1790s it would be encapsulated by the French journalist and translator of Juvenal, Jean Dusaulx.[24] In the preface to his 1796 edition of Juvenal, Dusaulx writes that the 'characteristics of Juvenal were energy, passion, and indignation', and that 'His great aim was to alarm the vicious, and if possible, to exterminate vice'.[25] Dusaulx's comments embody the eighteenth-century emphasis upon Juvenalian satire as a forcefully direct and indignant mode of attack.[26]

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[21] *Poems*, i. p. 434.

[22] S. T. Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems* (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), p. 83.

[23] Ashley Marshall, 'Satire', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 506; Andrew Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 40.

[24] See Dustin Griffin's discussion of the influence of Dryden's definitions of Horatian and Juvenalian satire, in *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1995), p. 24. Steven Jones discusses the mixed reception of Dusaulx's views on Roman satire, suggesting that contemporaries like Gifford were more persuaded by his definition of Juvenalian satire than Horatian. See his essay on 'Intertextual Influences in Byron's Juvenalian Satire', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 33 (1993): p. 773-74.

William Gifford for one was greatly influenced by this satirical model, and would go on to quote from (and commend the 'ample justice' of) Dusaulx's definition in his 'Essay on the Roman Satirists', which prefixed his own 1802 translation of Juvenal's satires.[27] Gifford's heavy sarcasms in the *Anti-Jacobin*, with its blunt weekly denunciations of the 'Lies' and 'Misrepresentations' of (those accused of being) Jacobins, may be seen to stem in part from this interest in Juvenal's approach to satire.[28] The popular success of the *Anti-Jacobin* gestures towards a contemporary taste for the Juvenalian mode, a taste that, as W. B. Carnochan discusses in an influential 1970 essay, initially appears somewhat counterintuitive.[29] It 'seems odd', Carnochan writes, 'that an age of sentiment should find much to admire in a scabrous, no-holds-barred sort of poet like Juvenal'.[30] Carnochan goes on to argue that this reality is, in fact, not as surprising upon reflection as it first seems. '[W]hen an eighteenth-century critic looks at Juvenal', he writes, 'the "anger" or "spleen" that pleased Dryden but offended many others comes more and more to be read as a spontaneous elevation of feeling, the sign of a free spirit'.[31] Whether one accepts Carnochan's analysis or not (and it has been disputed, notably by William Kupersmith), it provides one way of looking at the context in which Coleridge chose to produce 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter'.[32] From this perspective, we may see him bowing, almost, to a strong contemporary taste, despite having objected to it in previous years in favour of the gentler and more self-reflexive Horatian model.

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[25] Jean Dusaulx, *Satires de Juvénal* (Paris: Didot Jeune, 1796), trans. William Gifford, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis, Translated into English Verse* (London: W. Bulmer & co., 1802), p. liii.

[26] William Kupersmith details perceptions of Juvenal in the eighteenth-century in 'Juvenal as Sublime Satirist', *PMLA*, 87 (1972): pp. 508-511.

[27] Gifford, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis*, p. liii.

[28] See for instance *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, i. pp. 573-81; Kenneth R. Johnston describes the Juvenalian quality of the *Anti-Jacobin* in 'Romantic Anti-Jacobins or Anti-Jacobin Romantics?', *Romanticism on the Net*, 15 (1999): p. 32.

[29] Pieces from the *Anti-Jacobin* continued to be published long into the nineteenth century, notably in editions of *The Beauties of the Anti-Jacobin, or, Weekly Examiner* (London: J. Plymsell, 1799). Kenneth R. Johnston discusses this lasting popularity in 'Romantic Anti-Jacobins or Anti-Jacobin Romantics?', pp. 1-36.

[30] W. B. Carnochan, 'Satire, Sublimity, and Sentiment: Theory and Practice in Post-Augustan Satire', *PMLA*, 85 (1970): p. 260.

[31] Carnochan, 'Satire, Sublimity, and Sentiment: Theory and Practice in Post-Augustan Satire', p. 261.

[32] Responding directly to Carnochan, Kupersmith argues that 'Actually, the eighteenth century simply held what was the standard opinion of Juvenal from the time of the early church fathers till the nineteenth century, in which Juvenal's reputation fell into a decline from which it has not yet recovered': William Kupersmith, 'Juvenal as Sublime Satirist', *PMLA*, 87 (1972): p. 508.

Perhaps, then, ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ represents a deliberate attempt to write a popular piece, one that goes further in seeking to achieve this aim than Coleridge had previously attempted. Though he clearly felt enraged at the actions of the Pitt administration (evident in his repeated expressions of anger at the events of La Vendée), the Juvenalian qualities of the poem may be read as an attempt to cohere with popular taste. This reading presents itself particularly strongly when the poem is viewed alongside ‘The Raven’ (as Ted Hughes implies it should be).[33] Both ‘The Raven’ and ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ were explicitly framed as eclogues when they were first published in the *Morning Post*. As Chapter Three demonstrates, however, ‘The Raven’ conspicuously complicates this framework. Whilst its parallels with the February eclogue of Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calendar* initially lead the reader to expect a simple allegorical moral fable, the poem in fact ends with a perplexing outburst of misdirected rage. The raven celebrates the drowning of innocent strangers, believing himself revenged by their demise for the death of his family at the outset of the poem. As argued in Chapter Three, this conclusion may more convincingly be read as a criticism of contemporary satires like *Pitti-Clout & Dun-Cuddy* (with its concluding promotion of violence), which in their unmediated vitriol and simplistic aggression lean more towards Juvenal than Horace.

‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, however, has a different relationship to the satirical models from which it borrows. Described in its subtitle as a ‘War Eclogue’, the poem similarly appears to respond to the contemporary fashion for satirical Spenserian eclogues on contemporary political issues. *Pitti-Clout & Dun-Cuddy* was a particularly notorious (and, as Jon Mee puts it, ‘sophisticated’) instance of this genre, but I would like to suggest that Coleridge also seems to have been aware of other, more explicitly apocalyptic, examples (examples more immediate than ‘the enraged Dante, Milton, Jeremy Taylor’ that

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[33] Ted Hughes to Seamus Heaney, 24 Jan. 1994: *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 660-61.

Anya Taylor cites as Coleridge's models).[34] One such piece is *A Political Eclogue*, published anonymously in pamphlet form in 1797, and featuring a dialogue between 'Citizen H. T***E', 'Citizen T**RN**Y' and one 'R. B. Esq.'. The first two names thinly disguise the Whig politicians John Horne Tooke and George Tierney (with the extra asterisk in the latter not present in the text itself), whilst the third character, who appears to represent the voice of reason in the poem, perhaps refers to the author.[35]

Unlike the radical and anti-ministerial *Pitti-Clout*, *A Political Eclogue* is loyalist in nature, and, as its review in the *Monthly Review* proclaims, 'The spirit of party (*ministerial party*) which animates it is violent'.[36] It opens with Tooke and Tierney proudly boasting their 'spurious fame' and their success in 'court[ing] distinction from the grov'ling herd', before Tierney launches into a description of the hellish power of his own rhetoric:

> I spoke, and Phrenzy kindled at the sound,
> And party's flaming spirit rag'd around;
> That fell Magician, whose tremendous power
> Unchains the furies in their maddest hour;
> Whose wand, like death, lays all distinctions low,
> Unlocks the sources of domestic woe,
> Inflames the fiends of anarchy and strife
> And stains with deepest shade the all of life.[37]

The piece has clear parallels with 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', not least in the recurring appearance of 'furies', whose anarchic violence is contrasted in both poems with the 'domestic' scenes against which it is directed. Later in the poem, Tooke encourages Tierney to go to war in 'fields of blood' on the side of the French, painting images of desolation very similar to those in 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter'. The demons Coleridge describes being unleashed in La Vendée, which 'clapped their hands and danced for glee', are reminiscent for instance of the 'horrid joy' of the 'Hell-hounds' described by Tooke in the earlier piece.[38] A dark humour is derived in both poems from the contrast between the peaceful and pastoral connotations intimated in their self-descriptions as ‘eclogues’, and the reality of blood-soaked fields and ravaged homes that they in fact present.

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[34] Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity, and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 162; Taylor, 'Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, Slaughter", p. 715.

[35] Anon., *A Political Eclogue. Citizen H. T***e, Citizen T**rn*y, R. B. Esq.* (London: H. Fry, 1797).

[36] *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal, Enlarged*, 108 vols (London: R. Griffiths, 1797), xxiii. p. 108.

[37] Anon., *A Political Eclogue*, p. 5.

These correspondences, and particularly the similar subversion of the term ‘eclogue’ (which is not present in *Pitti-Clout*’s more straightforwardly Spenserian depiction of a rustic singing competition), suggest that Coleridge may have been directly aware of, and responding to, *A Political Eclogue*. Yet ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ does not, unlike ‘The Raven’, conspicuously subvert and undermine its ‘political eclogue’ predecessors; indeed, Coleridge actively amplifies the Juvenalian severity of poems like *A Political Eclogue*. The underlying target in that poem, particularly in the extract from Tierney’s monologue quoted above, is ‘Phrenzy’ and the ‘fell Magician’ of ‘party’s flaming spirit’. The work thus plays into a broader eighteenth-century concern with moderating enthusiasm, which represents ‘a dangerously unstable internal force’, as Jon Mee puts it in *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, ‘that threatened the integrity of both the individual and society as a whole’.[39] By focusing on this underlying target, *A Political Eclogue* is also able to acknowledge (although much less damningly) the emotional excesses of the ministry, for instance expressing doubts about the suspension of Habeas Corpus, which removed any bar to ‘The Sanctioned savage’ (i.e. a judge) consigning, with ‘wild passion’, ‘the imprison’d victim to his doom’.[40]

Coleridge injects no such note of balance into the very personal attack expressed in ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’. For Morton Paley, the poem possesses the ‘hallmark’ of the ‘apocalyptic mode’, namely an elevation of the subject to an ‘archetypal force’.[41] Pitt ceases to be human in ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, becoming instead a demonic power, invoked but never represented, able to mastermind destruction and summon furies with wild ‘Halloo[s]’.[42] By dehumanising his target in this way, Coleridge simplifies and intensifies his attack, denying any hint of human sympathy, and condemning Pitt unconditionally as an inhuman devil.

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[38] *Poems*, i. p. 441; Anon., *A Political Eclogue*, p. 8.

[39] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 23.

[40] Anon., *A Political Eclogue*, pp. 10-11.

[41] Morton Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 145

This intensification suggests on the face of it a wholehearted embrace of the mode in which he was writing. Unlike ‘The Raven’ and Coleridge’s satirical writing in 1795, ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ does not appear to temper its attack with any Horatian ambiguities or self-undermining subtexts. One possible reason for this, as suggested above, might be that Coleridge was attempting to adopt a popular genre in order to appeal to readers’ extant tastes. *A Political Eclogue* had been well-reviewed (with the *Monthly Review* stating that ‘the spirit of the poetry is excellent’), and the apocalyptic satirical mode was widely used at this time.[43] The nightmarish *Death of Basseville* by Vincenzo Monti (published in 1793) was contemporarily felt to have had a strong part to play in the resurgence of apocalypticism in the Romantic period, influencing, or being seen to have influenced, everyone from Southey to Gillray.[44] In this context, Coleridge may be seen to be writing in a style and tradition that was widely popular (on both sides of the political spectrum), despite the fact that he had been critical, in previous years, of the kind of untempered satirical severity he embraces in doing so.

Monstrous representations of Pitt in particular were popular in the anti-ministerial press. On 19 December 1797, for instance, (around the time when Coleridge must have been writing ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’) the *Morning Post* contained a poem entitled ‘The British Cerberus; Or, the Triple Headed Monster’. One of the many satires printed that December that focused on the Assessed Taxes, the piece

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[42] *Poems*, i. p. 442.

[43] *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal, Enlarged*, 108 vols (London: R. Griffiths, 1797), xxiii. p. 108.

[44] Vincenzo Monti, *In Morta di Ugo Bass-Ville* (Verona: Pietro Bisesti, 1793); The *Annual Review* claims that ‘Mr. Gillroy stol [sic] of this poem when he designed his apotheosis of Hoche’. *The Annual Review, and History of Literature*, 7 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805), iv. p. 585; Gillray’s *Apotheosis of Hoche*, complete with fiends striding across battlefields, is strikingly reminiscent of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’. Printed on 11 January, 1798, just a few days after Coleridge’s own response to Hoche’s death and his treatment of La Vendée, it seems to me to be just possible that Gillray had recently read and been inspired by Coleridge’s poem (published on 8 January 1798); Joseph Phelan discusses Monti’s influence on Southey in ‘Poetic Apostasy: Southey’s “A Vision of Judgement” and Vincenzo Monti’s “In Morte di Ugo Bass-Ville”’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42 (2011): pp. 47-51.

(signed ‘F.’) attacks Pitt’s policy by means of an extended comparison between the Prime Minister and Cerberus:

> Who has not heard of CERBERUS? of whom the Poets tell,
> That he was Lord High Keeper in Pluto’s Court in Hell;
> Whose *shadowy* wealth, collected from spirits wan and cold,
> Resembles *Bank*, the *fleeting* shade of our *departed gold*.[45]

The comparison paints Pitt with a monstrous appetite for the British people’s wealth (‘*swallow*[*ing*] *cap and all*’), and concludes that, although Cerberus is fearsome, Pitt is the more dangerous:

> Old Cerberus paid no powder tax, his heads with snakes were grac’d,
> And on his legs, by Jove’s command, were massy fetters plac’d;
> But Pitt himself unfetter’d, would have others gagg’d and bound,
> While barking in the *Treasury beams*, his serpents hiss around.[46]

As in ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, Pitt here is presented as a hellish and bestial tyrant, one who has ‘unfetter’d’ his devilish will just as he has ‘unlocked [the] den’ of slaughter in Coleridge’s poem.[47] Not only, then, was Coleridge borrowing a popular contemporary genre in writing ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, but by centring the poem on Pitt he was also following closely in the footsteps of his fellow satirists at the *Post*.

This effort to write in a particular mode for a particular readership is also visible in Coleridge’s adoption of other satirical motifs commonly used in the *Post*. In an article on ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, John Barrell points out a particularly personal slight that occurs towards the close of the poem. Discussing Famine’s warning that the starving multitude ‘shall seize [Pitt] and his brood’, Barrell argues that this mention of a ‘brood’ sarcastically references the fact that ‘Pitt had no children; [and], more to the point, to suggest that he had, in radical and Opposition circles of the 1790s, would have been to suggest what was widely believed to be impossible'.[48] Pitt's sexual abstinence was frequently satirised in the 1790s press, and attributed to various causes (the one singled out by Barrell being that he 'had no genitals').[49] It is a line of attack that may also be seen in Mary Robinson's third 'Tabitha Bramble' ode for the *Post* (published four days after 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter'), in which she describes Pitt variously as the 'VIRGIN-BOY' and the 'VIRGIN OF BRITAIN', lusting for others' gold rather than for women.[50] Given its prevalence in contemporary oppositional satire, the motif's appearance in 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' once again reveals Coleridge turning to unusually severe personal attacks in order to provide what regular *Morning Post* readers had come to expect.

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[45] ‘The British Cerberus; or, The Triple Headed Monster.’ *Morning Post* [London], 19 Dec. 1797, p. 4. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975546/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=02b42731. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[46] ‘The British Cerberus; or, The Triple Headed Monster.’ p. 4.

[47] *Poems*, i. p. 441.

Because 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' is such a forceful and direct piece, it appears almost unique amongst the satirical poems Coleridge wrote in the 1790s. Unlike his satirical writing earlier in the decade, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' is remarkably Juvenalian in its intensity. Even 'Parliamentary Oscillators', written in the same circumstances and for the same readership, does not go quite so far in its condemnation of a single individual, seeking instead to persuade, not damn, a group, rather than one man. This section has argued that the poem's intensity, its apocalyptic rage, was a conscious choice, one that knowingly emulates a popular contemporary genre in order to appeal to the *Morning Post*'s readership. As the next chapter will illustrate, however, this was not such a simple task for Coleridge: even in a poem like 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', something of his underlying resistance to uncompromising satirical severity may be discerned.

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[48] John Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000): p. 294.

[49] Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', p. 294. Coleridge had also used the 'brood' metaphor in 1795, in *The Plot Discovered*, where he mentions Pitt's cockatrice brood (i.e. suggesting the brood into which he was hatched, rather than that produced by himself). *Lects 1795*, p. 288. The 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' reference could of course be read in this way too, but the ambiguity of the brief remark opens up space for Barrell's interpretation of the brood being his own children, an interpretation that is not possible in the earlier piece.

[50] T. B. 'A New Song, to an Old Tune.' *Morning Post* [London], 12 Jan. 1798, p. 2. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975665/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=f0e4e7bd. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

Chapter Five: Sage

Coleridge seems to have appreciated being part of the collaborative environment of the London press, at least at times. In a letter of February 1800, he reflects on his time at the *Morning Post* with a revealing metaphor:

> We Newspaper scribes are true Galley-Slaves—when the high winds of Events blow loud & frequent, then the Sails are hoisted, or the Ship drives on of itself—when all is calm & Sunshine, then to our oars.[1]

As well as describing the natural rhythms of journalistic work, the image echoes his earlier assertions (in letters to John Estlin for instance) that his acceptance of a role with the *Morning Post* was the product of financial necessity, which had forced him to work against his will like the 'Galley-Slaves' of his metaphor.[2] Yet there is also a sense of comradeship here. Other newspaper contributors are not rivals or wrongdoers whom he seeks to correct; they are fellow travellers working alongside him to propel the British press onwards (to what destination is unclear). The implication, which his satire of late 1797 supports, is that Coleridge enjoyed feeling part of a wider journalistic community, and that his active engagement with contemporary satire was the product of genuine enthusiasm.

Yet in almost the same breath Coleridge admits the selfishness of such a position. The sentence following his galley-slave metaphor announces that

> it is not unflattering to a man's Vanity to reflect that what he writes at 12 at night will before 12 hours is over have perhaps 5 or 6000 Readers![3]

Suggesting that newspaper writing can flatter a sense of one's own importance, Coleridge gestures towards fundamental misgivings about his role at the *Morning Post*, echoing more explicit denunciations of the material he had published within its pages. '[I]f any important Truth, any striking beauty, occur to my mind', he wrote to Josiah Wedgwood in 1798, 'I feel a repugnance at sending it garbled to a newspaper', preferring instead only to dash off material that he knew would be 'pleasing [...] to my Employers'.[4] The comment supports Zachary Leader's wider claim that 'Journalism was always strictly segregated in Coleridge's mind from [his] more elevated pursuits', because it satisfied the demands of others rather than articulating genuine conviction.[5] Finding satisfaction in the fact that such material was widely read, Coleridge's letters suggest, is merely taking a vain pleasure in fame for fame's sake.

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[1] *CL*, i. p. 569.
[2] See for example *CL*, i. p. 372.
[3] *CL*, i. p. 569.

His *Morning Post* satires bear fundamental traces of this anxiety. Though they willingly embrace the 'ideas of ludicrous personality' (as Coleridge describes them) that he found readily to hand in contemporary satire, they do not simplistically imitate the satirical conventions to which they respond.[6] Even 'Parliamentary Oscillators' and 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', written at the start of his engagement with the newspaper, reveal a continued and almost instinctive sense that satire of the kind he was required to produce was intrinsically morally harmful. The result is a delicate balancing act. On the one hand Coleridge produces satirical pieces that satisfy the expectations of Daniel Stuart and the *Morning Post*'s readership, adopting the tropes and the targets of his fellow satirists in order to do so. On the other hand, however, the way in which he employs these tropes betrays a continued (though less explicit) scepticism not only about the motivations of contemporary satirists, but about the moral impact of satire in general.

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[4] *CL*, i. p. 365.

[5] Zachary Leader, 'Coleridge and the Uses of Journalism', in *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet*, eds Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 25.

[6] *CL*, i. p. 365.

5.1

When Coleridge came to defend the severity of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, in the ‘Apologetic Preface’ attached to it in *Sibylline Leaves*, he opened with an epigraph from Ecclesiastes:

> THERE IS ONE THAT SLIPPETH IN HIS SPEECH, BUT NOT FROM HIS HEART; AND WHO IS HE THAT HATH NOT OFFENDED WITH HIS TONGUE?[1]

The quotation sets up the central argument laid out in the preface, namely that the poem had not expressed Coleridge’s true feelings, but rather represented a sort of slip of the tongue, the result of his youthful fancy running away with him. The reviewer of *Sibylline Leaves* for the *Monthly Magazine* was unconvinced by this argument, writing that

> Fire, famine, and slaughter, the poet’s master-piece, written in 1794, fills six pages of the volume; but in 1817 he judges it necessary to preface it by twenty-four pages of apology, in which Pitt, his fiend of 1794, is, by the same pen, in 1817, converted into ‘a good man and great statesman’. Alas, poor Yorick![2]

For this reviewer, Coleridge’s apology displays an attempt retrospectively to imbue his earlier work with his later political views.[3] Many modern critics, including Anya Taylor and John Barrell, have taken a similar stance, siding with the *Monthly Magazine* against the Coleridge of 1817.[4] This section will address their arguments by taking Coleridge’s preface a little more at its word. When viewed in the context of his earlier satirical works, an underlying parallel between his 1817 apology and his views about satire in the 1790s begins to emerge. Once discerned, this parallel prompts a fundamental re-reading of the satirical effects not just of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, but of ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ as well, thus suggesting new perspectives upon Coleridge's whole approach to producing satire for the *Morning Post*.

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[1] *Poems*, i. p. 429.

[2] ‘Unsigned Notice, *Monthly Magazine*’, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage, Volume 1: 1794-1834*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson, 3 vols (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2002), i. p. 392.

[3] Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves*, p. 116. *Sibylline Leaves* in fact gives 1796, though the *Monthly* reviewer mentions 1794. Both precede the actual date of composition in late 1797.

[4] Anya Taylor, ‘Coleridge’s “Fire, Famine, Slaughter”: The Vendée, Rage, and Hypostasized Allegory’, *European Romantic Review*, 21 (2010); John Barrell, ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000): pp. 276-98.

Central to the argument of the 'Apologetic Preface' is a discussion of the relationship between the 'imagination' and 'passion'.[5] Coleridge begins by asking

> whether the mood of mind, and the general state of sensations, in which a Poet produces such vivid and fantastic images, is likely to co-exist, or is even compatible with, that gloomy and deliberate ferocity which a serious wish to *realize* them would pre-suppose.[6]

In order to answer this question, Coleridge presents two examples, asking his reader to suppose 'that we had heard at different times two common sailors, each speaking of some one who had wronged or offended him'. The first utters a 'rapid flow of those outrè and wildly combined execrations, which too often with our lower classes serve for *escape-valves* to carry off the excess of their passions', whilst the second, 'on the contrary, with that sort of calmness of tone which is to the ear what the paleness of anger is to the eye, shall simply say […] "[I'll] cut the —— to the liver!"'.[7] It is the second of the two men, Coleridge suggests, that reveals the greater 'malignity' within. His 'inveterate thirst of revenge [...] exercises as it were a perpetual tautology of mind', and 'admit[s] of no adequate substitutes', no allegorical excesses. The first man, by contrast, is merely letting off steam (to take up Coleridge's analogy).[8] From this example Coleridge concludes that the 'wildly combined execrations' of his own poem are simply the escape-valves for his 'active fancy', and are thus not consistent with a malingering desire to exact revenge upon Pitt.

If 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' initially seems Juvenalian in its violent allegorical excesses and sublime anger, this prefatory argument directly undercuts such a reading. Though Coleridge does not place his satire in the context of Juvenal at any point, and indeed rarely discusses the satirist at length, eighteenth-century perceptions of Juvenalian satire are helpful in decoding Coleridge's attitude to his own satire. The previous section has discussed how Juvenal became associated in the eighteenth century with sentimentalism, his anger being read, firstly by Dryden, as a genuine and 'spontaneous elevation of feeling' (to quote W. B. Carnochan).[9] John Hill, writing in 1751, develops this association in a discussion of contemporary perceptions of Juvenal: 'Admirers [of Juvenal]', he writes, 'think him an angry Writer, whose Subject required him rather to tear to the Bone, than to play about the Imagination'.[10] The two alternatives presented here fit neatly with the two sailors Coleridge describes in his 'Apologetic Preface'. The first sailor's 'wildly combined execrations', produced merely by his 'active fancy', parallel what Hill dismisses as 'play about the Imagination', representing a flight of fancy not founded in deeply-held fury or 'thirst for revenge'. It is the second sailor's simple yet violent speech, from which Coleridge emphatically distances himself, that echoes Hill's account of true Juvenalian anger, which should earnestly and straightforwardly 'tear to the Bone' (just as the second sailor hopes to 'cut the — — to the liver!"'). Read in this way, Coleridge's 'Apologetic Preface' can be seen as a pre-emptive renouncement of the Juvenalian label that subsequent critics, like Ashley Marshall, have attached to it.[11]

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[5] *Poems*, i. pp. 430-31.
[6] *Poems*, i. p. 430.
[7] *Poems*, i. pp. 431-32.
[8] *Poems*, i. pp. 431-2.

Of course, there is a great deal of ambiguity between what constitutes genuine vitriol and what is merely fanciful 'play about the Imagination', and many critics have consequently found Coleridge's defence somewhat hollow. Anya Taylor, Robert Maniquis, and Alan Weinberg (among many others) have agreed with the *Monthly Magazine*'s 1817 reviewer in suggesting that the 'Apologetic Preface' represents an attempt to cover up his earlier political views, and to downplay the intensity with which he expressed them.[12] Among modern critics, however, it is John Barrell who has taken greatest issue with the perceived disingenuousness of Coleridge's preface. Denouncing it as a 'disavowal of the poem's ancestry', Barrell argues that the representation of the imagination in the 1817 preface is not consistent with that presented by Coleridge in the 1790s, particularly in his 1795 lecture on the slave trade. Barrell summarises Coleridge's argument in that lecture as follows: 'God has given us the faculty of imagination, [Coleridge] then wrote, to enable us to imagine a future better than the present, and to stimulate us to attain it'.[13] Imagination, far from merely acting as an 'escape valve', has in this account the power of revivifying 'the dying motive within us', as Coleridge then put it. For Barrell, this implies a wholly different reading of 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' to that which Coleridge promotes in 1817, transforming the poem into 'one that, by imagining an end to the war, stimulates us to take the murderous step—the assassination of Pitt—supposed to be necessary to achieve it'.[14] Viewed in terms of satire, Barrell's reading returns the genuine bite of Juvenalian anger to the poem. Rejecting Coleridge's dissociation of its imaginative flourishes from deeply held anger, Barrell suggests that 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' in fact represents a sincere attempt to 'tear to the bone' (to quote Hill on Juvenal).[15]

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[9] W. B. Carnochan, 'Satire, Sublimity, and Sentiment: Theory and Practice in Post-Augustan Satire', *PMLA*, 85 (1970): p. 261.

[10] *The London Advertiser and Literary Gazette*, 12 Jun. 1751. Cited in Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism*, p. 27.

[11] Ashley Marshall, 'Satire', *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 506.

[12] Anya Taylor, 'Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, Slaughter": The Vendée, Rage, and Hypostasized Allegory', p. 721, Robert Maniquis, 'Filling up and Emptying out the Sublime: Terror in British Radical Culture', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000): pp. 377-78; Alan Weinberg, '"Yet in its depth what treasures: Shelley's Transforming Intellect and the Paradoxical Example of Coleridge', *Romanticism on the Net*, 22 (2001): p. 6.

The implications of this suggestion are most clear in a consideration of the poem's intended effect. Whereas the 'Apologetic Preface' presents it as the harmless and almost playful (in its lack of any 'serious wish') outlet of an overactive fancy, Barrell firmly categorises the poem as a 'provocativ[e] to alarmism', designed to alarm and reinvigorate the oppressed, and in turn to alarm the tyrannous with the threat of insurrection.[16] In this context it is easy to see why critics like Ashley Marshall have labelled 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' a Juvenalian piece. If its imaginative excesses are considered a provocative to alarmism, then it certainly mirrors contemporary perceptions of the satirical goals held by Juvenal himself, whose ‘great aim’, as Gifford has it, ‘was to alarm the vicious, and if possible, to exterminate vice’.[17]

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[13] Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', p. 292.

[14] Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', p. 292.

[15] *The London Advertiser and Literary Gazette*, 12 Jun. 1751. Cited in Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism*, p. 27.

[16] Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', p. 298.

To say that Coleridge shared a similar intention for his own satire would of course stand wholly at odds with the reflexive, self-questioning (and in general more Horatian) satire he had previously written. Maybe, in getting into the swing of things at the *Morning Post*, this was something he had allowed himself to accept, perhaps even to embrace (just as he appears to embrace the satirical metaphors of fellow poets like Mary Robinson, as shown in Chapter Four). A crucial passage from *The Fall of Robespierre*, however, provides several clues that something else may be going on beneath the surface. Written in late 1794 with Southey (who contributed the final two acts to Coleridge’s first), *The Fall* retells the recent events of the Thermidorian Reaction in Paris, in a manner fundamentally concerned with the relationship between emotion and its communication. This concern is perhaps most evident in the figure of Robespierre himself, and especially in the melodramatic descriptions of the murders and massacres he and his fellow Jacobins oversaw.

In one such instance, whilst haranguing Barrere for his suggestion that ‘Thou art too fond of slaughter’, Robespierre lets loose a figurative tirade:

> Thought Barrere so, when Brissot, Danton died?
> Thought Barrere so, when through the streaming streets
> Of Paris red-eyed Massacre o’er wearied
> Reel’d heavily, intoxicate with blood?
> And when (O heavens!) in Lyons’ death-red square
> Sick fancy groan’d o’er putrid hills of slain,
> Didst thou not fiercely laugh, and bless the day?
> Why, thou hast been the mouth-piece of all horrors,
> And, like a blood-hound, crouch’d for murder!
> Now Aloof thou standest from the tottering pillar,
> Or, like a frighted child behind its mother,
> Hidest thy pale face in the skirts of—*Mercy*![18]

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[17] Gifford, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis*, p. liii.
[18] S. T. Coleridge, *The Fall of Robespierre. An Historic Drama* (Cambridge: Benjamin Flower, 1794), p. 12.

Far from alarming or striking fear into Barrere, however, Robespierre's rhetoric is shown to undermine its own express purpose (namely to convince Barrere of his hypocrisy). In response, Barrere simply questions Robespierre's resolve:

> O prodigality of eloquent anger!
> Why now I see thou'rt weak—thy case is desperate!
> The cool ferocious Robespierre turn'd scolder![19]

The interaction perfectly illustrates Coleridge's suggestion, in the 1817 'Apologetic Preface', that 'eloquent', figurative (and, in both *The Fall* and 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', apocalyptic) rhetoric in fact reveals an absence of conviction, a lack of a genuine ferocity and 'thirst for revenge'.[20] The point is underlined still further when it is viewed in the context of *The Fall* as a closet drama: Robespierre's words, never intended for performance by their author, will by definition not be acted upon.[21] To put it in Hill's terms, Robespierre's language does not sincerely seek to 'cut to the bone', but instead weakly 'scold[s]', revealing his desperation.[22] When seen in this light, Barrell's suggestion that the argument posited in the 1817 preface represents a total 'disavowal' of his earlier views may be queried. It is possible to perceive, as early as 1794, the kernel of Coleridge's later account of the self-deflating effect of 'wildly combined execrations' and 'prodigality of eloquent anger'.[23]

Yet the extent to which this passage, and *The Fall* in general, reflects a perception of figurative language that Coleridge truly held has been debated. Both Richard Holmes and Edward Kessler, for instance, acknowledge the hollowness of the play's rhetoric (respectively arguing that the play is a 'farrago of rhetorical bad verse', and replete with 'generalities and abstractions' that are mere 'empty tokens'), but both take this more as a sign of poetic immaturity on the part of the authors, rather than a comment upon the relationship between figurative language and genuine emotion.[24] Chris Murray, by contrast, directly opposes these readings by suggesting that the play's figurative excesses and bombastic 'Miltonisms' draw attention to 'the inability or unwillingness of the politicians to communicate with each other', whilst William Jewett suggests that they are meant as a deliberate parody of the 'anachronistic classicism of French political rhetoric'.[25] The truth, perhaps, lies somewhere in between. Coleridge and Southey were certainly young and inexperienced playwrights, as testified to by the often nearly verbatim (though versified) extracts from contemporary newspapers that make up a large part of Southey's second and third acts. Yet whilst sections of these acts do appear (to use Kessler's phrase) 'verbal exercises', borrowing from and adapting other texts, Coleridge's first act implies a more conscious reflection on the nature of communication.[26] The presence of such a reflection may be supported by a consideration of his contemporary reading.

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[19] Coleridge, *The Fall of Robespierre*, p. 12.
[20] *Poems*, i. pp. 431-2.
[21] George Erving, 'Coleridge as Playwright', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 395.
[22] *The London Advertiser and Literary Gazette*, 12 Jun. 1751.
[23] *Poems*, i. pp. 431-2.

As early as January 1792, Coleridge had borrowed John Horne Tooke's *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley* from the Jesus College library. Literally translating to 'Winged Words', the Greek title refers to the central subject of his study, namely abbreviated forms of language. His central contention is that certain terms, and indeed entire linguistic categories, act as abridged or condensed substitutions for other words, with pronouns, for example, replacing fuller names for the sake of speed and convenience. Such '*Abbreviations*', Horne Tooke asserts, 'are the *wheels* of language, and the *wings* of Mercury. And though we might be dragged along without them, it would be with much difficulty, very heavily and tediously'.[27] In other words, as Stephen Prickett has put it, they achieve 'not so much a shortening of words as a short-cutting of *meaning*'.[28]

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[24] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772-1804* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 74; Edward Kessler, *Coleridge's Metaphors of Being* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 125.

[25] Chris Murray, *Tragic Coleridge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 53; William Jewett, *Fatal Autonomy: Romantic Drama and the Rhetoric of Agency* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) p. 37.

[26] Edward Kessler, *Coleridge's Metaphors of Being* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 125.

[27] John Horne Tooke, *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1786), i. p. 34.

[28] Stephen Prickett, 'Radicalism and Linguistic Theory: Horne Tooke on Samuel Pegge', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 19 (1989): p.8.

Horne Tooke's argument, following on from this, is that if words are reduced to their simpler antecedent forms and their etymological roots, linguistic communication may be conducted more accurately. In this he is an explicit successor to Locke (references to whom feature frequently in *Epea Pteroenta*). Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* had argued that complex ideas grow from, and are rooted in, simpler foundational ideas, a theory he illustrates by discussing language acquisition. 'If we will observe how Children learn Languages', he states,

> we shall find, that to make them understand what the names of simple *Ideas*, or Substances, stand for, People ordinarily show them the thing, whereof they would have them have the *Idea*; and then repeat to them the name that stands for it.[29]

As Locke describes it, these words denoting simple 'sensible' ideas often go on to form the basis of more complex ideas. '[*W*]*ords*', he writes,

> which are made use of to stand for Actions and Notions quite removed from sense, *have their rise from thence, and, from obvious sensible* Ideas, *are transferred to more abstruse significations*.[30]

Locke illustrates the point with the word 'Spirit', which, 'in its primary signification, is breath'. This conception of a process of almost metaphorical redefinition, whereby words for 'simple Ideas' come to signify more complex meanings, forms part of the basis of Horne Tooke's study.

As its title implies, *Epea Pteroenta* praises the potential usefulness of these signs or 'short-cuts' (to adopt Prickett's term) for expressing complex ideas and increasing the speed of communication. Yet, far more than Locke, Horne Tooke also stresses the resultant issues inherent to them:

> There is nothing more admirable nor more useful than the invention of signs: at the same time there is nothing more productive of error when we neglect to observe their complication.[31]

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[29] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 4 vols (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1700), i. p. 283.
[30] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, i. p. 233.
[31] Horne Tooke, *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley*, i. p. 34.

His study focuses principally upon the etymological roots of words designed improve the speed or '*dispatch*' of communication (conjunctions and prepositions, for instance). Yet he also has strong views about the misapplication of 'additions or alterations [to language that] have been made for the sake of beauty, or ornament, ease, gracefulness, or pleasure'.[32] His thoughts on this matter are most strikingly expressed in his condemnations of those who fail to appreciate the importance of etymology. 'My critics', he writes

> seem to think that *translation* is *explanation*. Nor have they ever yet ventured to ask themselves what they mean, when they say that any word *comes* from, is *derived* from, *produced* from, *originates* from, or *gives birth* to, any other word. Their ignorance and idleness make them contented with [...] vague and misapplied metaphorical language.[33]

In such responses to critics Horne Tooke advocates an awareness of the dangers of imprecise language, drawing attention to the potential for metaphorical and figurative language to be misused. '[M]etaphorical language', like pronouns, stands at a remove from the objects it denotes, and can, as a result, conceal ignorance and untruths. This indeed is his principal reason for writing *Epea Pteroenta*: he hopes that by revealing how language operates, it might be more carefully used, and humanity might learn and progress more rapidly. If 'Philosophy herself has been misled by Language', he asks in the introduction, 'how shall she teach us to detect his tricks?'.[34]

Having first read Horne Tooke in 1792 at the latest, Coleridge went on to praise this approach to language in his 1795 lectures (delivered in the wake of Horne Tooke's 1794 Treason Trial). 'He will not court persecution', Coleridge then wrote, 'by the ill-timed obtrusion of Truth, still less will he seek to avoid it by concealment'.[35] Such statements endorse Horne Tooke's emphasis upon the importance of linguistic precision, and the dangers of verbal 'concealment', in a manner that Coleridge would reiterate in 1796. In his 'Verses Addressed to J. Horne Tooke', Coleridge hails his subject as a

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[32] Horne Tooke, *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley*, i. p. 37.

[33] John Horne Tooke, *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnsons, 1798), i. p. 259.

[34] Horne Tooke, *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley*, i. p. 22.

[35] *Lects 1795*, p. 19.

> Patriot and Sage! whose breeze-like Spirit first
> The lazy mists of Pedantry dispers'd
> (Mists in which Superstition's *pigmy* band
> Seem'd Giant Forms, the Genii of the Land!).[36]

The 'breeze-like Spirit' (which Coleridge explicitly links to *Epea Pteroenta* in a footnote) embodies Horne Tooke's emphasis upon linguistic precision. As events like the 1794 Treason Trials had shown, the Government had a significant tendency to distort and misrepresent truth (as discussed in Chapter One). By illustrating how language may be better used, and the mechanisms by which its 'tricks' may be detected, Horne Tooke shows how to reduce such distortions to their proper stature.

Coleridge's opinion of Horne Tooke, evident in works like this, further helps to explain Coleridge's attitude to allegory and symbol as outlined in Chapter Three. It also makes sense of the ubiquitous failures in communication in *The Fall* (written just a few weeks before this comment), and particularly those that occur between Robespierre and Barrere. Robespierre's 'prodigality of eloquent anger' for instance, read in the light of Horne Tooke, represents a conspicuous example of 'vague and misapplied metaphorical language'. Coleridge demonstrates, in Barrere's response, that such language wholly fails to make an impact upon its hearers, and simply exposes the absence of a sincere accusation or threat (resulting, in Robespierre's case, from his consciousness of his loosening grip on power).

Coleridge's preface to 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' prompts us to see his satire in a similar light. It suggests that, like the figurative language employed in Robespierre's harangue, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' reveals an inherent lack of conviction. In the context of *The Fall*'s Tookean failures in linguistic communication (written just over three years before) it is certainly credible that this argument represents a point of view that Coleridge genuinely held in 1798 (thus giving credence to his re-articulation of it all those years later). In this respect it is interesting to note the similarity here between the giant forms of superstition in the 'Verses Addressed to John Horne Tooke', and the allegorical figures stalking the 'desolated Tract' in 'Fire, Famine and Slaughter'. From a Tookean perspective, both would be revealed as misrepresentations of reality when the ‘breeze-like Spirit’ of linguistic precision blows away the ‘lazy mists’ that conceal them. In the case of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, this misrepresented reality takes the form of the supposed ‘thirst for revenge’ from which they spring, and which they appear to embody (for instance in their pledge to ‘tear him limb from limb’).[37]

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[36] *Poems*, i. p. 266.

Andrew Cooper has shown that many of Coleridge’s other poems of early 1798 can be helpfully understood in the context of Horne Tooke’s continuing influence on his thought (though he does not mention ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’). Cooper examines the denunciations voiced in ‘Fears in Solitude’ for ‘Courts, Committees, Institutions, / Associations and Societies’, which represent ‘A vain, speech-mouthing, speech-reporting Guild’.[38] As Cooper sees it, such lines act as ‘a reinforcement of the politics of Horne Tooke’s theory of language’, distinctly recalling Horne Tooke’s condemnations of ‘vague and misapplied’ words, which are merely ‘mouth[ed]’ by critics, lawyers, and politicians who do not give thought to its meaning (treating them as ‘mere abstractions, empty sounds to which / We join no feeling and attach no form!’, as ‘Fears in Solitude’ puts it).[39] In this way, six years after his first encounter with Horne Tooke, the arguments of *Epea Pteroenta* may still be discerned within Coleridge’s writing.[40]

The metaphorical vagueness of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ appears much more intentional when viewed alongside these contemporary Tookean denunciations of misapplied language. Its figurative personifications of violence, which describe their actions in metaphorical and anthropomorphised terms not always easily transposable to real events (Famine rattling skulls to frighten wolves, for instance, or Fire ‘fl[inging] back my head and [holding] my sides’), are difficult to interpret realistically with regard to the actual events of La Vendée. This openness to misinterpretation even applies to the central subject of the poem, the four-lettered individual they discuss, which may be read in any number of ways (as Pitt, Old Nick, or even, under a more seditious interpretation, the King), as detailed in the previous chapter.

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[37] *Poems*, i. p. 443.

[38] *Poems*, i. p. 471.

[39] Andrew R. Cooper, ‘“Monumental Inscriptions”: Language, Rights, the Nation in Coleridge and Horne Tooke’, *ELH*, 66 (1999): pp. 93-94; *Poems*, i. p. 473.

[40] Coleridge would continue to grapple with Horne Tooke for years to come: c.f., for example, *CL*, i. p. 625.

In this context it is interesting to note that, as with Robespierre's speech in *The Fall*, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' ends with a bathetic critique of the characters' resolve. In response to Famine's and Slaughter's violent descriptions of how they will serve and repay their unnamed master (by 'gnaw[ing] the multitude', for instance), Fire criticises their speech:

> O thankless beldames and untrue!
> And is this all that you can do
> For him, who did so much for you?[41]

Just as Barrere perceives desperation in Robespierre's 'eloquent anger', so Fire detects a note of falseness (which is to say thanklessness within professed gratitude) in the metaphorical rhetoric of her fellow furies. By ending the poem on this critique, Coleridge introduces a hint of doubt regarding the effectiveness of the tone of the entire piece (leading us fundamentally to suspect the truthfulness of its speakers). This doubt, read in the light of Coleridge's interest in Horne Tooke, reflects a concern that metaphorical excesses are merely 'vague' 'speech-mouthing', supporting the preface's later assertion that the poem's 'wildly combined execrations' are in fact unfounded in sincere emotion.

Seen from this perspective, the Juvenalian intensity some critics have discerned in the satire becomes, on closer inspection, more of a veneer concealing uncertainty. This uncertainty corresponds to a lack of clarity in Coleridge's own political views, and the conviction he felt in contributing such pieces to the *Morning Post*. A letter he wrote to his brother George, a few weeks after 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' was published, reveals something of that lack of clarity:

> You think, my Brother! that there can be but two *parties* at present, for the Government & against the Government.—It may be so—I am of no party. It is true, I think the present ministry weak & perhaps unprincipled men; but I could not with a safe conscience vote for their removal; for I could point out no substitutes.[42]

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[41] *Poems*, i. p. 444.

[42] *CL*, i. p. 396.

The comment stands in stark contrast to the seemingly vehement satire upon Pitt in 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', in which the Prime Minister is painted as a supreme evil comparable to the devil. Coleridge does not exactly flatter Pitt in this contemporaneous letter, but neither does he portray him as a supremely malign influence to be removed at all costs. On the contrary: when the alternatives are taken into account, the Pitt ministry appears the preferable option.

Of course, as Tim Fulford points out in discussing the letter, it must be understood in the context of its intended recipient. 'The letter is addressed to George, Coleridge's church and state-supporting brother' (and an Anglican priest), Fulford writes, 'and it does its best to find common ground with him'.[43] Yet even in the context of attempting to find common ground with its reader, the letter is striking in its renouncement of the argument of his *Morning Post* satire: it is not a rephrasing or obscuring of his position, but a complete reversal. Even in his clearest attempts to win favour with his brother elsewhere in his correspondence, Coleridge does not make quite such strong statements, instead merely implying that his political views *might* not be as fixed as they appear. 'How often and how unkindlily', he laments in an earlier letter to George, 'are the ebullitions of youthful disputatiousness mistaken for the result of fixed Principles!'.[44] The cynical renouncement of all alternatives to Pitt is very different from such statements. The fact that Coleridge was capable of writing it, especially so shortly after producing a satire like 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', corroborates the impression that the poem itself had sprung more from 'play about the imagination' than deeply held hatred and a desire to 'cut to the bone' (to return to Hill's terminology). Viewed in this way, the 'fiery heart' that Anya Taylor discerns within the poem is perhaps not as fiery as it first appears.[45]

This is not necessarily to say that Coleridge is consciously or deliberately parodying or subverting the apocalyptic Juvenalian mode he adopts (although a certain amount of conscious subversion is a possibility, as the next section will examine further). If anything, it affirms the impression, given in his correspondence, that he felt a degree of frustration with the requirements of his role at the *Post*. Chapter Four has shown how the pressure of producing poetry on demand for Stuart ('Something must be written & written immediately') led Coleridge to conform with established contemporary satirical tropes.[46] In 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' the psychological result of this forced conformity is made visible. By echoing, consciously or otherwise, elaborate dialogue from his earlier writing (dialogue that he had explicitly suggested lacked a grounding in sincere emotion), Coleridge betrays his own emotional remove from the views his poem appears to espouse.

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[43] Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 232.

[44] *CL*, i. p. 125.

[45] Taylor, 'Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, Slaughter": The Vendée, Rage, and Hypostasized Allegory', p. 721.

In that same letter to Josiah Wedgwood, written 3 days before the publication of 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' (and thus possibly about contemporaneous with its composition), Coleridge affirms this emotional remove:

> nothing scarcely that has not a *tang* of personality or *vindictive* feeling, is pleasing or interesting, I apprehend, to my Employers. Of all things I most dislike party politics—yet this sort of gypsie jargon I am compelled to fire away.[47]

The magical or preternatural implications of the word 'gypsie', which was associated at the time with fortune-telling and the occult (as Laura Mooneyham White and Sarah Houghton-Walker detail), apply perhaps most strongly, amongst Coleridge's work of this period, to the chant-like rhetoric of 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' (with its incantatory repeated chorus of 'The same! the same! / Letters four do form his name [...]' and its supernatural protagonists).[48] The word 'jargon', placed immediately after this adjective, once again emphasises the impression of the rhetorical hollowness of this kind of poetry. Coleridge indicates an awareness that, like jargon, his 'gypsie' satire is mere 'gibberish' (to use Johnson's definition of jargon), consisting of words that lack felt significance, written to order in a fashionable satirical form of the day (namely, the apocalyptic mode of pieces like ‘A Political Eclogue’).[49]

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[46] *CL*, i. p. 365.

[47] *CL*, i. p. 365.

[48] Laura Mooneyham White, 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy: Narrative Disruptions and Ironies in Austen's *Emma*', in *Jane Austen's Emma*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2010), pp. 124-25; Sarah Houghton-Walker, *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 4-6.

Noting this implied comment on ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, Patrick Keane partially dismisses its relevance. ‘Coleridge may have a point’, Keane writes, ‘but hardly enough of one to persuade us that all the vindictive glee of the “War Eclogue” [...] is to be attributed to the partisan demands of Daniel Stuart!’.[50] Keane may be right in so far as ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ appears to go above and beyond the requirements of Coleridge’s employer, setting forth a nightmarish satirical denunciation of the Prime Minister far stronger than the owl and duck allegory of ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, for instance. Yet in this very excess Coleridge, it may be argued, achieves the opposite effect: from his ‘prodigality of eloquent anger’ we may discern, as Barrere does of Robespierre, that his resolve is ‘weak’.[51] This is not necessarily to contradict Keane’s suggestion that Coleridge enjoyed writing the piece, merely that his enjoyment may be better defined as a letting off of imaginative steam (to use the image from his preface). In its figurative excess, the poem flags up the imagery’s distance from his true feelings, which were more complex and ambivalent. In this way, what first appears a powerful and angry ‘neo-Juvenalian’ satire, becomes on re-reading more equivocal and detached from sincere anger, and in that sense less Juvenalian.

Yet whilst distance from emotion and ‘play about the imagination’ do not fulfil the late eighteenth-century conception of Juvenalian satire (held by writers like Gifford and Hill), they perfectly fulfil that of Juvenal’s critics in the seventeenth. René Rapin, for one, asserts in 1674 that ‘with all his strong Expressions, *Energetic* Terms, and great Flashes of *Eloquence*, [Juvenal] makes little Impression’.[52] ‘It is not a true Zeal’, Rapin continues, ‘that makes him talk against the Misdemeanors of his Age, ’tis a spirit of Vanity and Ostentation’.[53] Whilst Coleridge’s guilt of the latter charges is open to debate, the impression of his satire outlined in this section is strikingly similar to the wider accusation of insincerity as articulated by Rapin. Coleridge’s debts to Horne Tooke, his contemporaneous comments on his *Morning Post* material, and of course his 1817 preface, all point to a similar interpretation of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’. Because it is eloquent and figurative, and often vague in its allegorical significance, it is a poem that does not express ‘true Zeal’.

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[49] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: J. F. and C. Rivington et al, 1785), i. p. 992. ‘A Political Eclogue’ is discussed in the previous chapter.

[50] Patrick Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), p. 312.

[51] Coleridge, *The Fall of Robespierre*, p. 12.

[52] Rapin’s position was subsequently taken up by Boileau, who cast similar aspersions about the sincerity of Juvenal’s emotion (as Dustin Griffin details in *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, pp. 74-75).

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[53] René Rapin, *The Whole Works of Monsieur Rapin*, trans. Anon., 2 vols (London: H. Bonwicke, 1706), ii. p. 228.

5.2

If Coleridge felt the apocalyptic figurative language of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ betrayed an inherent lack of ‘true Zeal’, then this goes some way toward making sense of why he felt comfortable publishing a poem that stands in such stark contrast with the distaste for aggressively personal satire he had articulated in earlier years. This is an explanation that also makes sense when applied to ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, despite the significant difference in tone between the two poems. Though ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ is more whimsical than aggressive, it does betray a similar subversion of its own satirical force. By comparing the poem with contemporary satirical material from both oppositionist and pro-government newspapers, this section will suggest that ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ contains an underlying critique of its own form. Though like ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ it initially appears to embrace contemporary satirical tropes and language, its underlying implications gesture towards Coleridge’s continuing unease about their effect on readers.

The previous section has suggested that, as a result of this unease, Coleridge sought to assure that ‘the Poem was not calculated to excite *passion* in *any* mind’ by employing rhetoric reminiscent of Robespierre in *The Fall*, in the hope that readers would respond like the unaffected and critical Barrere.[1] It could be responded that such a reading leaves ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ feeling somewhat hollow, devoid of any attempt to communicate sincere feeling. Yet in a sense this hollowness plays directly into Coleridge’s criticisms of contemporary political discourse more generally. In ‘Fears in Solitude’, Coleridge condemns the empty unfeeling language of contemporary newspaper journalism, language which promotes an emotional detachment in its readers, and a failure to sympathise with suffering. In particular, he criticises the way in which violence and unrest are reported, with euphemism and metaphor disguising the true horrors of war,

> As if the soldier died without a wound;
> As if the fibres of this godlike frame

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[1] *Poems*, i. p. 433

> Were gor'd without a pang: as if the wretch [...]
> Pass'd off to Heaven, translated and not kill'd.[2]

Christopher Stokes argues that this passage in particular epitomises the poem's critique of the 'disincarnated language' of contemporary public discourse, with Coleridge using an exaggeratedly religious linguistic register to emphasise the distance between the 'free-floating realm of media signifiers [and the] violent reality' of war.[3] In addition to serving as an analogue for 'disincarnated' media signifiers, however, the register of this passage may also be read as a sarcastic and critical appropriation of specific instances of journalistic grandiloquence. The contemporary press had a tendency to elevate conflict to a euphemistic and often almost godlike level, describing the 'glories' of battles and giving soldiers epithets like 'Sons of Mars'.[4] Such language glorifies war and those who fight it, encapsulating Coleridge's complaint that the elevated and euphemistic language of newspaper reportage obscures the corporeal human suffering ultimately caused by war.

Newspaper satire was particularly guilty of obfuscating suffering in this way. A good illustration of this, much-reprinted in the run up to Coleridge's publication of 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', was 'La Sainte Guillotine' (subtitled 'A New Song. Attempted from the French'). First published anonymously in the *Anti-Jacobin* on 4 December 1797 (with no name or pseudonym given beneath subsequent printings either), the piece describes the threat of a French invasion, and the war-torn country from which it would originate (threatening to engulf Britain in the same turmoil).[5] It opens by warning of the invasion, the threat of which was rising to a crescendo at the turn of 1798:

> FROM the blood bedew'd valleys and mountains of France,

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[2] *Poems*, i. p. 473.

[3] Christopher Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, pp. 45-46.

[4] See for instance *The Times* [London], 22 Sept. 1797, p. 3. The Times Digital Archive, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/CS16914742/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=546168ee. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[5] *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, i. p. 136-38; see also 'La Sainte Guillotine.' *True Briton* [London], 20 Dec. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2001570189/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=a21e84a7. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

See the Genius of Gallic INVASION advance![6]

Even in its first few lines, the poem begins to elevate the invading soldiers into a spirit-like force detached from the identities of its individual constituents, whose blood ‘bedews’ the ground as though the product of some natural (and painless) meteorological process. Such poetic denunciations of French aggression inherently overlook the corporeal ‘pang[s]’ of soldiers.

By its close, the poem moves fully into metaphor and euphemistic satirical understatement in its discussion of the inevitable consequences of such an invasion:

How our Bishops and Judges will stare with amazement,
When their Heads are thrust out at the *National Casement*!
When the *National Razor* has shaved them quite clean,
What a handsome oblation to *Sainte Guillotine*![7]

Both ‘National Casement’ and ‘National Razor’ refer to common French euphemisms for the guillotine (‘la Petite Fenêtre’ and ‘la Razoire Nationale’), and the poet gleefully adopts and extends the metaphors.[8] Similarly, the poem mixes registers, building upon the central conceit (of the French as devotees to the bloodthirsty ‘Sainte Guillotine’) by using religious terminology to transform the guillotine itself into an ‘Altar’, and executions into ‘oblation[s]’. In so doing, it provides a perfect example of the kind of linguistic insincerity Coleridge condemns in ‘Fears in Solitude’. Far from highlighting the pain of past and future victims, it uses inappropriate language to provoke laughter rather than empathy.

Satire in oppositionist newspapers was no different. Though it was more likely to be directed at British policies than French ones, the representations of death and war within them were similarly poetic and indefinite. The *Morning Chronicle*, for instance, printed in early 1798 a piece to be ‘sung at the anniversary of Mr. Fox's birth', in which the realities of violence are similarly obscured, albeit in service of a different message:

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[6] *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, i. p. 136.

[7] *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, i. p. 138.

[8] On French terms for the guillotine see George Armstrong Kelly, ‘From Gibbet to Simple Machine’, *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, 13 (1986): p. 203.

> When a Legion of Soldiers keep watch o'er each town,
> To strike the faint spirit of Liberty down; [...]
> Shall *Chains*, or *the Grave*—the *sad choice of the Slave*
> Thus blast the fair glories of Runnymede's day?[9]

Although it seeks to stir its readers into protest at Pitt's oppressive domestic (and warmongering foreign) policies, the poem's imagery and rhetoric similarly obscure the true nature of the wrongdoing he commits. Regardless of the underlying political point, this image of the 'faint spirit of Liberty' being struck is almost as removed from the brutal reality as an 'oblation' is from an execution (indeed, it is unclear how a spirit can be struck at all). If 'Fears in Solitude', as Mark Jones argues, 'unfocuses the moral spotlight' away from a single culprit (and onto a broader non-partisan perception of the 'euphemis[tic]' and 'performative dynamic of the public sphere'), then newspaper satire of all political stripes would have provided Coleridge with much to criticise.[10]

Given his distaste for grandiose or euphemistic language, and his awareness of its inherent inability to convey human suffering, it is surprising that Coleridge's own satires at the turn of 1798 indulge in it to so large an extent. On the one hand, as the previous section argues, this can be read as an attempt to temper Juvenalian fire with abstruse metaphorical language. On the other, however, it perfectly embodies the kind of writing that Coleridge so explicitly condemns in 'Fears in Solitude' for its failure to communicate the true horrors of war. 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' is undoubtedly the more guilty of this, with its figurative personifications of violence and suffering describing generalised ills (although it does have one brief account of pain on an individual level: the starving 'baby beat[ing] its dying mother').[11] Other than this instance, the poem's more metaphorical and poetic accounts of violence obscure the 'pang[s]' of the 'wretch[es]' on whom it is inflicted just as much as the satires in the *Anti-Jacobin* and *True Briton*.

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[9] *Morning Chronicle* [London], 27 Jan. 1798, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815487/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=ff53379c. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[10] In making this point Jones follows Paul Magnuson, who argues that the *Fears in Solitude* volume as a whole must be understood in a contemporary public context, as a series of responses to the state of public political discourse, particularly in newspapers. Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, p. 67; Mark Jones, 'Alarmism, Public-Sphere Performatives, and the Lyric Turn: Or, What Is "Fears in Solitude" Afraid of?', *boundary 2*, 30 (2003): pp. 67-105.

Though the subject matter of 'Parliamentary Oscillators' is not war but parliamentary politics, it is nevertheless guilty of a similar, if much less overt, obfuscation of the realities of violence. It is in this obfuscation that an underlying purpose, or inclination, becomes apparent within Coleridge's satirical writing of this time. Of particular concern in this regard is the second stanza's query about whether the titular oscillators are '*really* able to descry / That precipice three yards beyond your noses?'.[12] Coleridge's use of the word 'precipice' here is loaded with contemporary significance. Newspaper reports and editorials at the turn of 1798 used the word to refer to the potential for widespread civil unrest and violence as a result of the policies of the Pitt administration, particularly the Assessed Taxes. One such report, from the *Morning Chronicle* of 26 December 1797, reads as follows:

> We are now advanced to the extreme point of that precipice of destruction on which we totter, ready to fall into the abyss of unfathomable calamity that yawns beneath our feet; and have no means of escape but by retracing those steps which led us thither, and which threaten difficulties scarcely less surmountable, but certainly less dangerous.[13]

Like the religious terminology of 'La Sainte Guillotine', the extended metaphor of the cliff edge, as used here, operates at a remove from the physical events to which it refers. By adopting it in his satire on the Assessed Taxes (published four days after this article), Coleridge is guilty of the same hollowness of language, the same obfuscation of suffering and violence.

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[11] *Poems*, i. p. 442.

[12] *Poems*, i. p. 421.

[13] 'To the Right Hon. Wm. Pitt, Chancellor of the Exchequer.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 26 Dec. 1797, p.3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815094/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=8db33a1a. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020. A similar use of the term 'precipice' may be found in 'Assessed Taxes.' *Morning Chronicle*, 14 Dec. 1797, p. 2. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815002/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=a6a6092b. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

Yet Coleridge's adoption of the image does not reveal a straightforward complicity in this crime. As the wider context of the passage reveals, Coleridge is not simply stating that the previously loyal oscillators had perceived the precipice to which Pitt was leading them, and were for this reason speaking out against him. He is instead asking them if they are '*really* able to descry' the danger. In the context of Coleridge's criticisms of vague journalistic language, this distinction is key: it suggests the possibility of misperception and ties it to the contemporarily commonplace 'precipice' metaphor. A few lines later, Coleridge makes the point more explicit. 'I admire', he writes, 'no more than Mr. Pitt, / Your jumps and starts of patriotic prosing'.[14] These lines highlight that the satire is not just taking aim at their indecisive wavering, but also at their dishonesty, their hollow 'prosing'. The parliamentary speeches Lushington (one of the oscillators Coleridge singles out in his subtitle) had made in opposition to the Taxes, for example, were strewn with allegorical assertions of the dangerous effect the bill would have on the 'lower orders' of society. The *Oracle* reports one such speech, in which Lushington asserted that

> The staff of the country was in the hands of the lower orders; and he dared to predict, that if they were crippled [by the proposed bill], the building they support would totter and decay.[15]

There is a clear distance between the vigorous metaphorical assertions of Lushington's metaphorical speech, and the oscillating uncertainty he in reality felt (evident in the fact that he did not oppose the bill in its later stages).[16] Viewed in this light, Coleridge's questioning whether Lushington (along with 'the Whole Troop of Parliamentary Oscillators') were '*really* able to descry / That precipice' may be read as a comment on their language as much as anything else. Though they asserted the presence of a danger in grand allegorical terms, they in fact could not *really*, Coleridge intimates, grasp the reality of it. Read in this way, ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ becomes just as much a critique of misleading language as it is of political oscillation and cowardice.

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[14] *Poems*, i. p. 421.

[15] As reported in 'Parliamentary Intelligence.' *The Oracle and Public Advertiser* [London], 15 Dec. 1797, p. 1. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2001042257/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=5403c3fb. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[16] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 138.

It is striking, on re-reading ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ in this light, just how saturated the poem itself is with different and often conflicting allegories and metaphors. Having started with the image of Common Sense ‘hitch[ing] her pullies’ to the oscillators’ eyelids, Coleridge moves on to the ‘precipice three yards beyond [their] noses’, followed first by a description of them as ‘chicken[s]’ and then as ‘serpent-tongue[d]’ liars. After this there comes the ‘sly inchanter’ image (from Merry’s and subsequent satires of Pitt), the ‘mad Devil [...] on revolutionary broom-stick scampering’, and finally the extended simile of the owl and duck ‘Both plunged together in the deep mill-stream’.[17] There are almost as many similes and metaphors as there are stanzas, lending the poem a somewhat confused and kaleidoscopic effect.

It may be contended that Coleridge was fully aware of this effect, and deliberately sought to create it in order to comment upon the misleading language of the oscillators, and of public political discourse more generally. The key to such a claim lies in the last and most extensive of his allegories: that of the owl and duck. The image draws upon an eighteenth-century children’s pastime (most popular in the years around 1750), the crucial details of which are outlined in *The History of Sport in Britain*:

> Sometimes [a] wretched duck was put into the water with an owl tied to its back. [...] The owl, in this strange position, promptly started hooting, which, of course, frightened the duck, who as promptly dived, and by so doing soused the owl. On the return to the surface, the performance was repeated again and yet again, until the owl was drowned and the duck very nearly in the same condition.[18]

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[17] *Poems*, i. p. 421-22.

[18] ‘Little Known Sports and Pastimes’, *The History of Sport in Britain, 1880-1914*, ed. Martin Polley, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 2004), i. p. 147.

Borrowing his image from this sport, Coleridge outlines a similar scene in ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, with the ‘green-neck’d Drake’ representing the oscillators, frightened by the ‘Ministerial screech’ of the owl.[19]

It is a convoluted analogy at best, and in a poem of eleven stanzas Coleridge requires four (one of which has two additional lines) to explain it fully. The fact that he feels it necessary to include a final stanza to clarify the metaphor (explaining that it is ‘Even so on loyalty’s Decoy-pond’) further exemplifies its fundamental lack of clarity: Daniel Isaac Eaton did not append an explanation to *Politics for the People*’s subtitle, *A Salmagundi for Swine*, explaining that it is ‘even so with the British population’. Not only is Coleridge’s simile overlong, but it is also confusingly worded. The owl and duck, for instance, are (except for one inclusion of the word ‘drake’) referred to obliquely, with Coleridge asking ‘You know that water-fowl that cries, Quack! quack!?’, and describing the owl as ‘the Bird of Wisdom’ and ‘the ivy-haunting bird, that cries, Tu-whoo!’.[20] Just as it takes Coleridge a relatively long time to explain the figures and the premise of his simile, so it takes the reader some time to decode exactly how it operates.

To give it some credit, the image does make the animals’ parliamentary referents appear sufficiently ridiculous. Yet in so doing it also feels as though Coleridge lets Pitt somewhat off the hook. Instead of being the malevolent ‘sly inchanter’ he appears earlier in the poem, he has become a helpless creature subject to the whims of schoolchildren. Far from endangering the public with his schemes, he is transformed into an object of pity. Of course if Coleridge’s intention was to persuade the oscillators to vote against Pitt in the Commons (and Carl Woodring argues that it was), presenting him as helpless and pathetic was one way to go about it.[21] At the same time, however, this does to some degree weaken the fundamental case the satire seeks to make: namely that Pitt’s bill is a malevolent ‘ravenous Bill’ that endangers the country, and that should consequently be voted down.[22] Not only does the owl simile make Pitt, and by association his bill, seem weak and ineffectual, but it also imbues him with connotations of 'Wisdom' (connotations that are explicitly stated in the reference to the 'Bird of Wisdom'). The true malevolent force within the allegory, namely the individual or individuals responsible for subjecting the creatures to this ordeal, is not mentioned. As a result of these ambivalences and loose ends, the allegory may be held up as a case in point of the way in which imprecise metaphorical language can obscure the true nature of real-world threats.

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[19] *Poems*, i. p. 422.

[20] *Poems*, i. p.421.

[21] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 138.

Once this convoluted imprecision is discerned, the poem's embrace of popular contemporary satirical allegories like the 'Signor Pittachio' trope takes on a different tone. By adopting them in a poem that so concertedly undermines the impact of its own satirical and argumentative force, Coleridge may be seen to be anticipating the argument of 'Fears in Solitude'. Indeed, the way in which Coleridge introduces the owl metaphor makes this anticipation particularly conspicuous. Addressing the oscillators, he exclaims

> lo! a very dainty simile
> Flash'd sudden through my brain, and 'twill just suit 'e![23]

The word 'dainty' was rarely used by Coleridge in the years around 1798: one instance may be seen here, and another a few weeks later the section of 'Fears in Solitude' which condemns newspapers' and newspaper readers'

> dainty terms for fratricide;
> Terms we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues
> Like mere abstractions.[24]

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[22] *Poems*, i. p. 421.
[23] *Poems*, i. p. 421.
[24] *Poems*, i. p. 473.

The passage clearly associates the word ‘dainty’ with a Tookean distaste for the unfeeling language of contemporary political discourse. On its surface the term suggests an acute ‘delica[cy]’ or ‘effemina[cy]’ (to quote Johnson), but it also, as one of Johnson’s definitions puts it, has connotations of ‘affected[ness]’.[25] This sense perfectly captures Coleridge’s basic point, which is that euphemistic and figurative language reveal a greater concern for appearances, and for superficial linguistic effects, than human emotion and suffering.

By applying the same term to his ‘dainty simile’ in ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, Coleridge intimates an awareness that his own poem is guilty of a similar failing. From one perspective, this can be read as the natural conclusion to the poem’s underlying critique of the oscillators’ empty ‘prosing’. The suggestion that the simile ‘[will] just suit ’e’, viewed in this way, may be read not just as an expression of the aptness of the comparison, but also as an insinuation that the obscure allegory mirrors their own hollow language. Yet such an interpretation is not able to overcome the fundamental sense that Coleridge is also criticising himself, that he is casting aspersions as much on his own simile as on the speech of the individuals he addresses.

The implication that his satirical simile is ‘dainty’ can be read as a broader criticism of the satirical genre in which he was writing, one that Justin Shepherd claims to be present in ‘Fears in Solitude’ as well. Whilst discussing Coleridge’s criticism here of ‘dainty terms’ and words reduced to ‘juggler’s charm[s]’, Shepherd notes the appropriateness of his decision ‘to release into the texture of the poem at this point the equally monstrous language of allegory, that two-dimensional, satirical language of the *Anti-Jacobin*’s poem [‘New Morality’] and Gillray’s subsequent cartoon’.[26] Referring specifically to the blind ‘owlet ATHEISM, / sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon’, Shepherd’s connection of the passage with contemporary satire is a useful one. It gestures towards the notion that satire, alongside euphemistic war reportage, was at the forefront of Coleridge’s mind in his criticisms of contemporary newspapers. Though ‘New Morality’ and Gillray’s caricature of the same name were published some weeks after this poem (as Shepherd admits), a parallel can be drawn with another satirical allegory: the owl of ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’.[27] Whether or not Coleridge had in mind his own specific previous satirical use of the ‘ivy-haunting bird, that cries, Tu-whoo!’ (as he then put it), a definite concern regarding the insincere ‘daintiness’ of satirical allegory begins to become visible in his writing of early 1798.

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[25] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language, in which the Words are Deduced from their Originals*, 2 vols (London: J. F. and C. Rivington et al, 1785), i. p. 535.

[26] Justin Shepherd, ‘*Fears in Solitude*: Private Places and Public Faces’, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 32 (2008): p. 23.

This is not necessarily to say that ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, or ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ for that matter, contain a hidden agenda and a concealed attempt to amend the problems Coleridge perceived in contemporary political discourse. Though by April he may have felt ready to come out and condemn newspaper journalism publicly in ‘Fears in Solitude’, in January his disillusionment with the medium was confined to correspondence. For Nikki Hessell, Coleridge’s correspondence of early 1798 reveals a private sense of profound despondency and ‘professional disenchantment’, brought about by the realisation that his new role amounted to little other than being a ‘hired paragraph-scribbler’.[28] Whether in the violent yet ultimately somewhat vague allegory of ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, or in the copious and convoluted similes of ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, his satire betrays this disenchantment. The poems seem simply to go through the motions, self-consciously gesturing towards their own hollowness, and almost sarcastically exaggerating the failings Coleridge perceived in his contemporaries (both in satire and in political discourse more widely).

His choice of the pseudonym ‘Laberius’, under which both ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’ and ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ were published, makes particular sense when the poems are read in this way. Decimus Laberius, as Macrobius records in his *Saturnalia*, was a Roman knight (‘eques’) and noted writer of mimes and satires, chiefly known for an incident that occurred at a public theatrical contest at the Plebeian Games in 46 A.D. For reasons that are unclear, Julius Caesar compelled Laberius to perform in one of his own pieces, an indignity that brought shame to an individual of his rank and resulted in the loss of his equestrian status.[29] Complying, Laberius used his prologue to condemn Caesar, asserting that 'Needs must he fear, who makes all else adread', at which all present 'turned to look at Caesar', as Macrobius reports, 'indicating that this scathing gibe was an attack on his despotism'.[30] Given that this is the incident for which Laberius is most notorious, there are several ways in which Coleridge's adoption of his name may be interpreted.

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[27] Shepherd, ‘*Fears in Solitude*: Private Places and Public Faces’, p. 23.

[28] Nikki Hessell, ‘Coleridge and the “Rhapsody on Newspapers”: A New Intertext for “Fears in Solitude”’, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 30 (2007): p. 28.

Those who have commented on it have tended to focus on the political implications. John Barrell, for instance, has taken it to represent a comment upon Pitt, comparing the pseudonym with contemporarily commonplace associations in the radical and oppositionist press between the Prime Minister and classical dictators.[31] Morton Paley makes a wider claim, considering the implications for Coleridge's view of himself: the choice of pseudonym, Paley writes, 'presents the poet as a satirist who defies dictatorial authority, but it also points up his vulnerability to that authority'.[32] Both of these readings draw sound conclusions about the contemporary relevance of the story of Laberius, and they undoubtedly would have struck any *Morning Post* reader versed in classical literature.

However, one aspect of the story is apposite to Coleridge's situation in a more direct and personal way, though it would not necessarily have been immediately obvious to a contemporary reader. This is the fact that, at the story's heart, there is a fundamental sense of humiliation, of having been forced by circumstances beyond one's control to participate in a public comic performance, and grudgingly agreeing despite believing it to be inappropriate or undignified. Focusing on this aspect of Laberius's story, it is not inconceivable that Coleridge might have identified with Laberius's plight at least to some degree. Like him, Coleridge had been forced to accept his role at the *Post* by circumstances, in this case financial. In the letter to Josiah Wedgwood of 5 January, 1798 (discussed in the introduction to Chapter Four), Coleridge asserts that 'There remain within my choice two Sources of Subsistence: the Press, and the Ministry', before detailing his 'anxiety for the future' and his need to provide for his children.[33] Like Laberius, it is clear that Coleridge also felt the role to be somewhat beneath him, evident not least in his description of journalists (and himself as one of them) as 'paragraph-scribbler[s]', thoughtlessly 'compelled' to 'fire away' their 'gypsie jargon'.[34] An awareness of these personal implications of the pseudonym does not necessarily downplay the interpretations that Barrell and Paley have given; certainly there is a parallel to be drawn between Laberius and 1790s satirists, and between Julius Caesar and William Pitt. But beneath this more overt political relevance it is possible that Coleridge conceived of more private similarities between his own situation and that of Laberius.

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[29] Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, trans. Percival Vaughan Davies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p.180; Decimus Laberius, *The Fragments*, ed. Costas Panayotakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 43.

[30] Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, trans. Percival Vaughan Davies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p.181.

[31] John Barrell, 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000): p. 293.

[32] Morton Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 141.

If so, Coleridge's choice of pseudonym points towards the overarching interpretation of 'Parliamentary Oscillators' and 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' put forward in this and the previous section. By fundamentally associating his identity, as the producer of these poems, with that of the humiliated Laberius, Coleridge gestures yet again to a reality that is subtly apparent from the poems themselves. They are not the products of independence and conviction, but rather of necessity, which has forced him to adopt a style of writing with which he has significant qualms. This is not to say that Coleridge disliked them as poems. The fact that he reproduced them in his later collections of poetry and could not resist owning up to his authorship of 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' in later years (as the *Sibylline Leaves* preface describes), stands as evidence that Coleridge was not embarrassed about their technical merits as poetry.[35] As satire, however, it is increasingly plain that his heart was not in them. Their excessive indulgence in figurative and allegorical language (as Coleridge himself flags up in various ways) often obscures their underlying arguments and undermines their ability to communicate a forceful moral point.

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[33] Coleridge is of course writing to his sponsor here, and so an emphasis on financial want is perhaps to be expected, but the underlying concern regarding his income is prevalent in many of his letters of this time. *CL*, i. p. 365, and e.g. *CL*, i. p. 371.

[34] *CL*, i. p. 365.

[35] *Poems*, i. pp. 429-40.

Compromised in this way, they serve as a critical and ironic (if somewhat despondent and self-pitying) intensification of the faults Coleridge perceived in contemporary satire, and in public political discourse as a whole.

5.3

Coleridge’s dissatisfaction with newspapers was not simply a personal distaste for the hollowness of their language. His ultimate concern, as his writing for the *Post* later in 1798 makes even plainer, was for the effect contemporary newspapers were having upon their readers. Paul Magnuson and Mark Jones have discussed in detail how these works reflect upon and critique contemporary reading habits.[1] For the most part, however, such discussions are principally concerned with non-satirical poetic works like ‘Fears in Solitude’, in which Coleridge explicitly laments newspaper readers’ insensitivity to suffering. After considering exactly what Coleridge thought of his readership and their reading habits, this section will argue that, as 1798 progressed, his satire similarly reveals an increasingly conspicuous preoccupation with this public insensitivity. ‘The Mad Ox’, published in July 1798, makes particular sense as an expression of the threat of imminent unrest and potential violence (although not necessarily the ‘Alarm of an Invasion’ with which he associates ‘Fears in Solitude’), and also of the wilful inability of newspaper readers and journalists to take its true consequences seriously.[2] Contemporary political satire, the ‘Mad Ox’ ultimately suggests, plays a role in exacerbating this mentality.

Coleridge’s writing, both public and private, suggests a fear that newspapers were increasingly transforming (or at least were complicit in the transformation of) their readers from active sympathisers into passive consumers of reported suffering. ‘Fears in Solitude’ makes the point most strongly in one of its best-known passages. To underline his point about the effect of disincarnated language, Coleridge describes the responses of the readers themselves:

> Boys and girls
> And women, that would groan to see a child
> Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war,
> The best amusement for our morning-meal![3]

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[1] Paul Magnuson, ‘The Politics of “"Frost at Midnight"”’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 22 (1991): pp. 3-11; Mark Jones, ‘Alarmism, Public-Sphere Performatives, and the Lyric Turn: Or, What Is “Fears in Solitude” Afraid of?’, *boundary 2*, 30 (2003): pp. 67-105.

[2] *Poems*, i. p. 468.

[3] *Poems*, i. p. 473.

The contrast between battle and the breakfast table draws part of its power from the sense that, because newspapers make suffering palatable, their reports are treated merely as another commodity to be consumed and enjoyed (even by those supposedly predisposed to sympathy). Building on Paul Magnuson's exploration of 'Fears in Solitude' in the context of contemporary reading habits (and the 'dialogue of interpretation' surrounding the threat of French invasion in April, 1798), Nikki Hessell focuses specifically on Coleridge's concern that newspapers were turning their readers into consumers. In 1796, he had denounced Pitt's categorisation of newspapers as luxury commodities, derisively contending that this revealed a belief that it was 'A *mere luxury* for the proprietors to be informed concerning the measures of the directors! a *mere luxury* for the principals to know what their agents are doing'.[4] Yet by 1798, Hessell argues, Coleridge had renounced this vision of the 'English reader as citizen, not consumer, as an active participant in democracy rather than a passive receiver of sensation'.[5] In 'Fears in Solitude' he suggests that the reverse was in fact the case: readers were indeed becoming more passive.

Part of the reason for this shift may be found in Coleridge's changing conception of the individuals who constituted these readerships. In *The Watchman* he had praised newspapers for providing information to individuals of all classes, citing both the example of 'coffee-house politician[s]' and 'The institution of large manufactories; in many of which it is the custom for a newspaper to be regularly read'.[6] By picking out readers in manufactories, Coleridge reveals his positive perception of newspapers' influence on society, which extends even to those who would otherwise be passive and disenfranchised (and potentially drawn to the alehouse and 'drunkenness').[7] Through this breadth of appeal, newspapers promote the cause of liberty throughout British society, stimulating a popular interest in governance. Regardless of which party they support (a detail 'of little comparative consequence'), Coleridge felt that they encouraged active political thought in their readers, and thus advanced the cause of liberty. ‘Men always serve the cause of freedom by *thinking*’, he writes in the introductory essay, ‘even though their first reflections may lead them to oppose it’.[8]

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[4] *TW*, p. 10.

[5] Nikki Hessell , 'Coleridge and the "Rhapsody on Newspapers": A New Intertext for "Fears in Solitude"', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 30 (2007): p. 29.

[6] *TW*, p. 13.

[7] *TW*, p. 11.

As the 1790s progressed, however, Coleridge became more jaded, and this broad conception of readerships began to narrow. In light of *The Watchman*’s representation of readerships, the image in ‘Fears in Solitude’ of readers seeking amusement at the breakfast table appears much less balanced. It is an image he reiterates in a letter to Daniel Stuart two years later, where he articulates a perception of the need for his journalism to

> harmonize with the tastes of [Lond]on Coffee house men & breakfast-table People of Quality, on whom [poss]ibly your paper depends in a great degree.[9]

The image associates the concerns regarding newspaper readers, as expressed in ‘Fears in Solitude’, with specific implications about their class. Making no mention of *The Watchman*’s glorified ideal of communal reading amongst factory workers, this vision of the *Post*’s audience is limited to a narrower cross-section of society: that of what Habermas would call the bourgeois public sphere.[10]

For Habermas, the journals read in eighteenth-century coffeehouses by their middle-class mercantile and professional patrons reflected, and in turn inspired, the free rational discourse with which such spaces were associated. ‘[P]eriodical articles’, Habermas writes (referring specifically to weeklies like the *Guardian* or *Spectator* in the early eighteenth century), ‘were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffeehouses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion’.[11] This new sphere of public discourse between bourgeois professionals in newspapers and coffeehouses was effectively, for Habermas, an extension of the private sphere. It took place away from the prying eyes of the state, and consequently allowed the prioritisation of rational enquiry and open debate, without fear of political repercussions.[12] Coleridge's comments about the *Post*'s readership may be understood in this light. He does not (as he had begun to in *The Watchman*) include elements of what Terry Eagleton has called the 'counter-public sphere', namely that to be found for instance in corresponding societies and labouring-class reading clubs (of which there were several kinds, and which also collectively purchased London dailies, alongside radical periodicals).[13] Coleridge's perception of the *Post*'s readership at the end of the 1790s is decidedly more narrow, limited to bourgeois 'People of Quality' at their breakfast tables and coffeehouses.

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[8] *TW*, p. 13.

[9] *CL*, i. p. 627.

[10] Referring to Stuart’s own claims that servants played a key role in choosing (and reading) noble households’ newspapers, Deirdre Coleman suggests that Coleridge may have been wrong in thinking this. Deirdre Coleman, ‘The Journalist’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 134.

[11] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 42.

He uses his *Morning Post* articles in 1798 to draw attention to what he perceived to be the risks of their behaviour, especially where the consumption of news was concerned. In his article on the 'Insensibility of the Public Temper', published on 24 February, Coleridge laments the oversaturation of war-related news from the continent, which had bred a malaise within the public sphere (in Habermas's sense of the term):

> The insensibility with which we now hear of the most extraordinary Revolutions is a very remarkable symptom of the public temper [...]. The dying convulsions of the Swiss Republics, the dissolution of the Germanic Confederacy [...] and the consequent annihilation of the independence of all those Princes and States who reposed under the protection of that great confederacy, are now scarcely thought worthy of being a theme for Coffee-house conversation.[14]

The passage makes a similar point to that of April's 'Fears in Solitude', arguing that newspaper readers no longer actively discuss and dissect, but have rather become passive and insensible recipients of sensational 'extraordinary' information. In making this point, however, Coleridge's argument is more explicitly class based than that of 'Fears in Solitude'. The 'we' in the first line, and the subsequent uses of the word ‘public’, appear not to refer to Paul Magnuson’s more inclusive redefinition of the late eighteenth-century public sphere (to include ‘any reader who can afford to buy’ any published work), but instead to a narrower perception of bourgeois readers engaged in ‘Coffee-house conversation’.[15]

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[12] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 27.

[13] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the* Spectator *to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 35-36. Ina Ferris discusses the activities of these bookish societies in detail in Ina Ferris, *Book-Men, Book Clubs, and the Romantic Literary Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[14] *EOT*, i. pp. 20-21.

In criticising the insensibility of these readers, Coleridge reflects a cultural shift in this Habermasian public sphere, one that both Mark Jones and Mary Favret argue to have taken place in the late 1790s. Accepting Habermas’s model, Jones argues that the war with France had prompted a significant distortion of the previously unfettered debate in the public sphere. In order to rally the country behind the war effort, the government instigated a ‘concerted’ campaign to ‘manipulat[e] the public’ and ‘debas[e]’ public debate into an unthinking pro-war consensus.[16] They did so, Jones writes, by using their influence with newspapers (many of which were owned by, or tacitly dependent on, the state) to create a widespread sense of alarm, heightened by the genuine threat of French invasion in early 1798 (which forms the explicit context given by Coleridge for ‘Fears in Solitude’).[17] Mary Favret, who also roots her argument in Habermas, makes a similar point, but states its implications for the public sphere more directly. She argues that, in response to the alarm surrounding the war and the threat of invasion (unlike Jones she does not discuss the government’s role in propagating this alarm), ‘the constitutive controversy of the public sphere dwindled as the public effectually identified itself with the desires of the State and an economic system fighting for its life’.[18] For Favret and Jones, the public sphere, previously associated with free and open discourse, had become passive, cowed into an unquestioning adoption of the government line.

Coleridge’s lament for the increasing ‘insensibility’ and unquestioning passivity of the public sphere displays his awareness of, and concern over, this shift. In his article’s closing argument, he issues a specific warning about the dangers of this unthinking passivity, which, he argues, makes the middle-class coffeehouse-goers complicit in the guilt of the ruling classes. ‘In the midst of these stupendous revolutions’, Coleridge writes,

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[15] Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, p. 13.
[16] Mark Jones, ‘Alarmism, Public-Sphere Performatives, and the Lyric Turn: Or, What Is “Fears in Solitude” Afraid of?’, *Boundary*, 2 (2003): p. 105.
[17] Jones, ‘Alarmism’, p. 105.
[18] Mary A. Favret, ‘Coming Home: The Public Spaces of Romantic War’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994): p. 541.

> the Nobility, Gentry, and Proprietors of England, make no efforts to avert that ruin from their own heads which they daily see falling on the same classes of men in neighbouring countries.[19]

The striking implication is that, unless any ‘man can bestir himself to rescue the Country which [Pitt] is about to ruin’, the oppressed and overtaxed British people may rise up and revolt just as they had in mainland Europe.[20] Coleridge crucially draws an implicit distinction here between those who are simmering with revolutionary anger, and those who continue in their insensibility to ignore the latent threat. This latter group includes not only the gentry, but also the ‘we’ of the opening line, namely the sphere of the *Post*’s readership, who (as Coleridge makes plain at the outset of the article) are languishing in ‘insensibility’ and ‘listless unconcern’.[21] Read in this way, the article echoes Lushington’s argument in Parliament the year before (discussed in Chapter Five), which asserted that

> The staff of the country was in the hands of the lower orders; and he dared to predict, that if they were crippled [by the Assessed Taxes], the building they support would totter and decay.[22]

Although Lushington stops short of predicting violence, the warning is similar to Coleridge’s. Like Lushington, Coleridge implores his insensible readers in the bourgeois public sphere to ‘bestir’ themselves from their passive consumption of news, to recognise the imminent threat posed by the suffering and discontent of the ‘lower orders’ of society, and to make their voices heard by a foolhardy ministry.

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[19] *EOT*, i. p. 22.

[20] Philip D. Jones, ‘The Bristol Bridge Riot and Its Antecedents: Eighteenth-Century Perception of the Crowd’, *Journal of British Studies*, 19 (1980): p. 91.

[21] *EOT*, i. p. 20.

[22] ‘Parliamentary Intelligence.’ p. 1.

This context, it may be contended, provides the key to unlocking the underlying significance of the satirical allegory laid out in 'Story of the Mad Ox'. On the surface, the poem expresses a simple warning about collective hysteria, illustrated in the fable of an over-driven ox that escapes its chains, only to be chased and goaded into madness by frightened villagers. The poem's subtitle gestures towards the overt satirical implications of the story, informing the reader that the tale 'gives a very humorous description of the French Revolution, which is represented as an Ox'. Read in this light, the satire justifies Coleridge's 'Recantation' (the title under which it was published in Southey's *Annual Anthology*) of his views regarding the war with France.[23] The poem implies that war is now necessary because, like the escaped ox, France has been driven to violent madness by unwarranted aggression. Most scholarship on the poem has interpreted the poem in this way, taking it primarily as a parable that asserts the consistency between his support for the war (after the French invasion of Switzerland) and his earlier calls for peace.[24]

However, when placed alongside Coleridge's contemporary concern about newspaper readers' insensibility, the 'Mad Ox' may be seen to contain a third significance: a warning regarding the potential for significant violent unrest at home in Britain. In order to grasp this warning, it is necessary to view the poem in the periodical context of mid-1798, where the image of the mad ox possessed an additional and more immediate set of connotations.

On 19 December 1797, the royal family processed from Buckingham Palace to St Paul's, with the intention of paying 'grateful acknowledgments to the Almighty', as the *Morning Chronicle* reported, 'for the three signal and glorious victories with which it has pleased the Divine Providence to crown the naval exertions of these kingdoms' (namely the victories of the Glorious First of June at Ushant, and the battles of Cape St Vincent and Camperdown earlier that year—although representatives of Admiral Hotham and Lord Bridport, who had had smaller victories at Genoa and Belle Isle, were also present at the procession).[25] The Royal Cavalcade commenced at eight in the morning, processing along Pall Mall, Fleet Street, and Ludgate Hill to St Paul's, passing on its way 'immense crouds who filled every avenue'.[26]

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[23] *Poems*, i. p. 504.

[24] Peter Kitson makes this argument in Kitson, 'Coleridge, James Burgh, and the Mad Ox: A Source for Coleridge's "Recantation"', *Notes and Queries*, 38 (1991): pp. 299-300; see also Patrick Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* (Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), pp. 288-89.

Whilst the Royal Family were in the cathedral, however, a disturbance occurred, one that only came fully to light in the reports of the following week (going unmentioned in the initial accounts of 20 and 21 December). 'Some villains', *Bell's Weekly Messenger* reported on the 24th,

> no doubt for the purpose of creating confusion [...] contrived to get an over-drove ox into the crowd, which ran up Ludgate-hill, causing an universal terror and dismay, and in the disorder several persons were thrown down and hurt. The beast after being severely wounded by the soldier's [sic] bayonets, was driven though St. Paul's Church Yard.[27]

Seizing on such intimations of a deliberate plot to disturb the peace, the oppositionist newspapers roundly mocked the perceived exaggerations within these claims. 'It would have been very remarkable', the *Morning Chronicle* states,

> if such a day as Tuesday had passed over without some *plot:* accordingly, a *cat* was said to be found in one place, and an *over-driven ox* was certainly seen in another; but whether the one or the other will require a *Special Commission*, we do not pretend to determine.[28]

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[25] 'The Royal Procession.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 20 Dec. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815035/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=7bc44026. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[26] 'The Royal Procession.' p. 3; 'The Mirror of Fashion.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 21 Dec. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815044/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=5e18762c. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[27] 'Royal Procession to St. Pauls.' *Bell's Weekly Messenger* [London], 24 Dec. 1797, p. 5. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000114605/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=8fe82b82. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[28] 'The Mirror of Fashion.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 23 Dec. 1797, p. 4. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815065/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=a4313a0c. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

The sarcasm of such responses ridicules the government's suspicion, with this particular instance also referencing reports that a cat had been removed from the Strand on the morning of the procession, for fear that it would injure the cavalry's horses.

In ridiculing this suspicion, the *Morning Chronicle* piece connects the incident with previous unrest caused by Pitt's policies. Special Commissions had for instance been set up a few months earlier in the wake of the Spithead and Nore mutinies among sailors of the Royal Navy, who demanded better pay and improvements to shipboard conditions.[29] The Special Commissions were intended to investigate and bring to trial the suspected radicals purportedly behind the disturbance, ultimately resulting in the ringleader, Richard Parker (who was found guilty of treason as well as piracy), being hanged on 30 June 1797.[30] This high-profile event epitomised the popular dissatisfaction with the Pitt administration and the aggressive nature of the government's response.[31] Except for a brief reinstatement in mid-1795, Habeas Corpus had been in continuous suspension since 1794, and increasing numbers of suspected radicals were arrested and detained.[32] The government responded to the growing number of riots (over food and government policies like the Assessed Taxes) by stepping up its suppression of radical organisations like the London Corresponding Society, which it suspected to be behind the actions of men like Parker (and which by 1799 it would outlaw altogether).[33] In this context, the incident at the Royal Cavalcade presented an opportunity for critics of the government to mock the government's increasingly aggressive response to popular dissatisfaction with its policies. They imply that the ox, like the rioters and mutineers, was simply responding to its circumstances, and that just as it is unnecessary to launch a Special Commission to investigate the one, so it would be with the other.

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[29] W. Johnson Neale, *History of the mutiny at Spithead and the Nore* (London: T. Tegg, 1842), p. 259; 'From the Delegates to the Admiralty', in *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, ed. Conrad Gill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 362-363.

[30] Ian M. Bates, *Champion of the Quarterdeck: Admiral Sir Erasmus Gower (1742-1814)* (Pomona: Sage Old Books, 2017), p. 238.

[31] Mark Philp, 'Revolution', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 23.

[32] Philp, 'Revolution', p. 23.

[33] Philp, 'Revolution', p. 23.

By the 25th, the ox had acquired the epithet that Coleridge would give his own. The *Morning Chronicle*, still gleefully covering the story, began a report on the removal of the disturbance by asserting that 'The *mad ox* occasioned no little alarm among the militia on Tuesday'.[34] Using the definite article, the *Chronicle* assumes its readers' familiarity with this now notorious animal, highlighting its ubiquity in the late-December newspapers. Coleridge, who was closely engaged with current affairs at this time (regularly contributing political and occasional writing to the *Morning Post*), would undoubtedly have been aware of the event. His own 'Mad Ox', written a few weeks later, bears several conspicuous echoes of the press coverage.

Among the most distinct of these echoes are the undertones of classical epic behind the poem. Transforming the parish parson (who leads the violent charge against the ox) into a Greek warrior, Coleridge undermines his courage in the comparison, declaring that

> Achilles was a warrior fleet,
> The Trojans he could worry:
> Our Parson too was swift of feet,
> But shew'd it chiefly in retreat.[35]

Such comparisons with epic mimic those in the contemporary reporting of the mad ox incident.[36] After detailing the militia's alarm, for instance, the *Morning Chronicle* report of 25 December introduced the figure of Colonel Sir Watkin Lewes (the commanding officer of the East Regiment of the London Militia) with a similar classical parallel. The *Chronicle* states that 'Colonel Sir WATKIN LEWES, who is a great classical scholar, took [the ox] for the *Trojan horse*'.[37] Such mockery of individuals like Lewes reveals the possible origin of Coleridge's own parallels with the Trojan War. Just as the parson paradoxically appears to take on the prowess of Achilles in his cowardice, so Lewes mistakenly perceives Greek deceit in the ox's innocence. In both Coleridge's poem, and in contemporary perceptions of the incident of 19 December, the ox reveals the injustice and unwarranted hostility of those in positions of power.

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[34] 'The Mirror of Fashion.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 25 Dec. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815072/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=4bcf377a. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[35] *Poems*, i. p. 507.

[36] In so doing, Coleridge makes explicit the poem's underlying Trojan connotations, which are also visible in the character of the 'Sage'. Allegorically representing radical critics of the war with France earlier in the 1790s, the sage takes on the qualities of a Laocoön, providing the mob with sound advice only to suffer admonishment ('Let's break his Presbyterian head!') as a result.

[37] 'The Mirror of Fashion.' *Morning Chronicle* [London], 25 Dec. 1797, p. 3. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-

This clear association in early 1798 between oxen driven mad and the overburdened and restless population adds a new set of connotations to the 'Mad Ox'. Coleridge's poem may be read, in light of this association, not only as a defence of his views about the war effort abroad (as it has hitherto solely been interpreted), but also as a reflection on the political situation at home.[38] Just as the farmer and owner of the ox in the poem ultimately meets a violent end after having chained and subsequently baited the ox, so too, Coleridge feared, would Pitt himself face further and more violent insurrection as a result of his oppressive policies (chaining with tax, and baiting with aggressive litigation and imprisonment).[39] In this sense the poem may be read as a reiteration of his warning in the article on the 'Insensibility of the Public Temper', namely that the ruling classes may soon experience a 'ruin' similar to that which had befallen the 'same classes of men in neighbouring countries'.[40] In addition to the overt French connotations, the name of the farmer in the 'Mad Ox', Old Lewis (who, having chained and neglected the ox, is chiefly responsible for the events), might thus also contain an underlying echo of the name of the chief representative of the state in the mad ox incident at the royal cavalcade: Watkin *Lewes*. Possible references like this, in addition to the wider symbolic significance of the ox at the turn of 1798, imbue the poem with an overarching contemporary relevance. As such, the satirical allegory serves not just as a

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com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000815072/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=4bcf377a. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[38] For instance by Kitson in 'Coleridge, James Burgh, and the Mad Ox: A Source for Coleridge's "Recantation"', and Patrick Keane in *Coleridge's Submerged Politics*.

[39] See satirical prints depicting John Bull fastened to a heavy burden of taxes by a supercilious Pitt, or baited by the dog-like forms of various ministers. 'Patience on a monument. Smiling at grief', no. 1868,0808.6693, www.britishmuseum.org/collection. British Museum. Online. Accessed 10.01.2020; *John-Bull, baited by the dogs of excise*, no. 1868,0808.5926, www.britishmuseum.org/collection. British Museum. Online. Accessed 10.01.2020.

[40] *EOT*, i. p. 20.

commentary on Coleridge's changing views about France, but a warning for the future of domestic British politics.

Such a warning would not have been unique amongst the poetry published in the *Morning Post* at this time. In January 1798, for example, Stuart had published within its pages a poem entitled 'The Blasted Oak', addressed 'to the Right Hon. William Pitt' and signed only 'P.'.[41] After lamenting that British 'Liberties are gone', the poet goes on to describe how

> Oppression vile usurps its place.
> She comes, with TREBLED TAXES in her hand,
> And War and Desolation sweep the land.[42]

The poem concludes with a warning much starker than Coleridge's, urging Pitt to 'Repent' and 'BRITANNIA'S *rising vengeance* learn to fear'. Only in so doing, the poet states, will he 'spare thy [...] head'.[43] Used to injunctions like this, *Morning Post* readers would not have had to stretch their imaginations very far to find a similar domestic warning in the 'Mad Ox'.

Yet unlike the explicit threat of violence with which P. concludes 'The Blasted Oak', Coleridge's poem ends on a somewhat perplexing note. If his intention had been to follow P. in making a bold injunction to the government to mend their ways, it would have made sense to conclude the poem with the sage's final exclamation that 'You *drove* the poor ox mad!'. Yet following this line, Coleridge instead chooses to add two further stanzas wholly unconnected to the preceding narrative, breaking out of reported events and into the first person:

> But lo, to interrupt my chat,
> With the morning's wet newspaper,
> In eager haste, without his hat,
> As blind and blund'ring as a bat,
> In rush'd that fierce aristocrat,
> The pursy woollen-draper.

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[41] P. 'The Blasted Oak.' *Morning Post* [London], 11 Jan. 1798, p. 2. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000975653/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=b442db60. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.

[42] P. 'The Blasted Oak.' p. 2.

[43] P. 'The Blasted Oak.' p. 2.

> And so per force, my muse drew bit,
> And in he rush'd and panted!
> 'Well, have you heard?' —'no, not a whit,'
> 'What! ha'nt you heard?'—'come, out with it!'
> 'That TIERNEY'S wounded Mr. PITT,
> 'And his fine tongue enchanted?'[44]

This sudden shift away from the tale and into the present tense comes quite out of the blue, and as a conclusion it poses more questions than it answers about the wider significance of the satirical allegory.

The stanzas have puzzled the few critics that have attempted to explain them. Carl Woodring and Gurion Taussig after him both suggest that Coleridge had originally intended these final lines as a defence of 'the awakened patriotism of Sheridan and Tierney', two prominent Whigs who had just begun to support the government in the war effort after many years of belligerent opposition.[45] To evidence this reading, Woodring suggests that Coleridge's rewritten ending (for the 1800 *Annual Anthology* version of the poem) was in fact the original ending.[46] In place of the last two lines of the woollen-draper's announcement, this 1800 version instead closes with the claim 'That Tierney votes for Mister Pitt, / And Sheridan's recanted!', lines which hark back to the sage's supposed recantation in the tale itself. Just as the sage is not really recanting, but in fact rationally adjusting his views about the need to restrain the ox, so too, these lines suggest, is Tierney's and Sheridan's newfound support for the war with France the result of a rational adjustment (and not a cowardly recantation, as they had been accused of by the right-wing press). Coleridge himself backs this up, in a marginal note in a copy of the *Anthology*, stating the poem was intended to reflect the fact that 'Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Tierney were absurdly represented as having *recanted*'.[47]

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[44] *Poems*, i. pp. 508-09.

[45] Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship, 1789-1804* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 171; Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 143.

[46] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 143.

[47] See *CPW*, i. p. 299.

Woodring suggests that Coleridge only altered the lines in the original 1798 *Post* version in response to Tierney's challenging Pitt to a duel (during an argument over naval spending), in which neither party was ultimately injured.[48] The new and somewhat confusing ending reflects, under this reading, Coleridge's annoyance with Tierney's unnecessary and widely-mocked stunt. Coleridge undermines his original conclusion, in Woodring's view, because he 'found the [original] thesis inappropriate in the confusion immediately after Tierney's opposition to Pitt became public comedy'.[49]

The reading provides a convincing explanation for the two endings, but one that nevertheless relies on a degree of speculation. Neither Woodring nor Taussig have any evidence of the switch-around they propose, and even if their interpretation is accepted, several puzzling aspects of the last two stanzas remain unresolved. Why is the intruder a woollen-draper, and why is he described as an aristocrat? Why bother with the interruption in the first place (especially considering that Coleridge does not include one in any other satire), when the allegorical significance is made clear in the subtitle? Why does the intruder state that Tierney has 'wounded Mr. PITT', when in reality no injuries had resulted from the duel (a fact included in the first reports of the event)?[50] In Woodring and Taussig's brief analyses of the poem's ending these issues go wholly unaddressed.

A tentative solution may be proposed by approaching the ending whilst bearing in mind the readership for which it was intended. Overlooking the many servants who, as Deirdre Coleman points out, had an important influence on the circulation of the *Post* in their households, Coleridge's predominant conception of his audience, as this section has discussed, was one of a public sphere of bourgeois coffeehouse and breakfast-table readers.[51] Coleridge's criticisms of the 'Insensibility' of these readers, and their passive unthinking consumption of sensationalist news, may also be seen to lie beneath the image of the ‘woollen-draper’.[52] Just as his ‘pursy’ appearance suggests an inability to control his appetite for food, so his behaviour in the scene, namely his hurried digestion and dissemination of the newspaper (before the ink has had time to dry), suggests an unrestrained appetite for news. So eager is he for this news, and so keen are the editors to provide it for him, that the truth of the matter is all but forgotten in their haste. Readers like the woollen-draper craved sensational news of violence, and in misreporting the outcome of the duel either the journalists or he himself have apparently misconstrued the events to fulfil this desire.[53] The image of the woollen-draper may thus be seen to emerge from Coleridge’s explicit concern that newspapers had become another luxury commodity to be consumed at the breakfast-table, and that the news they brought of war and suffering were merely ‘the best amusement for our morning-meal’.[54]

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[48] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 143.

[49] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 143.

[50] R. G. Thorne, *The History of the House of Commons: 1790-1820* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984), i. p. 384.

[51] Deirdre Coleman, 'The Journalist', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 134.

Consumers of these newspapers, Coleridge believed, shared the blame for the plight in which Britain found itself. In his article on the ‘Insensibility of the Public Temper’, Coleridge charges the public sphere of breakfast-table and coffeehouse readers (among whom merchants like woollen-drapers were counted) with the same faults as the ‘Nobility, Gentry, and Proprietors of England’: greed and insensibility.[55] If only they would ‘bestir [themselves] to rescue the Country which [they are] about to ruin’ (which is to say begin actively thinking and challenging the Pitt administration’s excesses, rather than languishing in selfishness), then potential future unrest at home could be avoided.[56] In this respect, woollen-drapers, like all bourgeois newspaper readers, are as guilty of the impending crisis as aristocrats. By calling the apparently harmless ‘blind and blund’ring’ woollen-draper a ‘fierce aristocrat’, Coleridge emphatically draws attention to this culpability.

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[52] Such criticisms are visible for instance in *EOT*, i. p. 20, and *Poems*, i. p. 473.

[53] No newspapers had reported that Tierney had wounded Pitt, and consequently this detail was possibly invented by Coleridge to underscore the point about cravings for reported violence.

[54] *Poems*, i. p. 473.

[55] Note Habermas’s argument that the public sphere was originally formed by merchants discussing commercial news. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 16.

[56] *EOT*, i. p. 20.

The poem closes with a final intimation that its own genre, satire, plays a crucial role in creating 'fierce aristocrats' of innocent woollen-drapers. The final reference to Pitt's 'fine tongue enchanted' is an unmistakable echo of Robert Merry's famous 'Signor Pittachio' trope (to which Coleridge had referred in other satires over the preceding months, as discussed in Chapter Four). The draper's mention of Pitt's enchanted/enchanting tongue feels somewhat out of place in his speech. It appears to suggest that, in addition to supposedly wounding Pitt in the duel, Tierney has also somehow affected the magical qualities of Pitt's tongue. The line transforms the concrete description of a physical wound into a supernatural satirical quip. If this is how the draper has heard the news, then the 'eager' glee with which he consumes and retells it is more understandable. Just as the active empathy of breakfast-table readers in 'Fears in Solitude' (who would 'groan to see a child / Pull off an insect's leg' in real life) is bypassed by sensationalist journalism, so the woollen-draper fails to realise the human consequences of the duel, either for Pitt himself or for a country rudderless amid a war (a very real concern when the duel was announced).[57] By concluding his poem with this line, Coleridge intimates a point he had expressed many times before: satirical tropes and allegories, especially when they are unthinkingly borrowed from other satirists, are liable to have a fundamentally blinkering effect on their readers.

Once again, then, Coleridge is using his satire to critique itself, and the newspapers in which it was published. In his satires of late 1797 and early 1798—'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' and 'Parliamentary Oscillators'—this self-critique appears almost involuntary. Whether it be in the hint of pretence in the Juvenalian anger of the former, or the unconvincing and convoluted elaboration of satirical allegories in the latter, these poems betray an underlying dissatisfaction with the medium and with the context in which they appeared. By the time he wrote the 'Mad Ox' (at some point before 30 July 1798), it is evident that Coleridge had begun to formulate a clearer conception of the dangers that might arise as a result of apathy and the late 1790s press. The 'Mad Ox' reiterates a perception, laid out in 'Fears in Solitude' and his prose *Morning Post* articles, of a vicious circle between journalists and their audiences.

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[57] *Poems*, i. p. 473.

Bourgeois breakfast-table readers seek ever more sensationalist news, and in providing such material for them, journalists and satirists reinforce this misguided and uncompassionate desire. The 'Mad Ox' uses its satirical allegory to highlight the gravity of the situation, creating an implicit parallel between the French Revolution and the possible violence and national 'ruin' that could yet occur in Britain.[58] Newspaper satirists, he intimates in his concluding stanzas, are wholly complicit in exacerbating this danger.

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[58] *EOT*, i. p. 22.

Chapter Six: Epigrammatist

Coleridge's epigrams, as Heidi Thomson notes, 'have barely been studied at all'.[1] This may in part be accounted for in the same way that scholarly disregard for pieces like 'Parliamentary Oscillators' may be accounted for: they are seen merely as brief offhand pieces chiefly written for financial, rather than artistic, reasons. Carl Woodring, despite conducting one of the most sustained discussions of the epigrams, is quick to dismiss them on these terms. Summarising 'Coleridge's original contributions to the field [of the epigram]', he is able to discern only one motivation for their composition: a 'desire to earn (or to get) bread and cheese, mostly by personal lampoon'.[2] The comment reflects earlier dismissals of the epigrams like that of Earl Leslie Griggs, who labels them 'trifling' and not worthy of sustained critical attention.[3] In taking this view, both Griggs and Woodring are perhaps influenced by the accounts of Coleridge's motives given in his correspondence, and particularly his various claims to have been 'compelled to fire away', for his own 'subsistence', 'any idea of ludicrous personality, or apt antiministerial joke' that comes to mind.[4] Such remarks suggest that there is at least an element of truth to Woodring's claim. Considerably shorter and (seemingly) more impromptu and ephemeral than many of the other poems Coleridge was contemporarily producing, the epigrams do certainly appear the sort of material it would have been relatively easy to 'fire away' unthinkingly for pay.

As Chapter Five has sought to illustrate, however, Coleridge's financial imperatives do not necessarily rule out the presence of ulterior motives and messages within his satire. J. C. C. Mays suggests as much in stating that 'Coleridge might have written many epigrams in a spirit of frivolous joking, or by the inch for pay, to fill a newspaper column, but their acerbity or delicacy is not affected by his motives, and they touch chords unsought by plangent notes'.[5] Like his other *Morning Post* satires of this period, the epigrams similarly betray deeper reflections both on the genre Coleridge was using and on his private emotions and anxieties. Following earlier suggestions made particularly by John Worthen, who approaches key pieces like the 'Epigram on a Supposed Son' from a biographical perspective (as this chapter will discuss), Heidi Thomson has exposed a significant undercurrent of private rumination beneath the apparently 'frivolous' surface of several epigrams.[6] Her central thesis, in so doing, is that their 'aloof satire [...] gave Coleridge a chance, not only to produce easy copy for the *Morning Post*, but also to express his deep-seated insecurity and unhappiness'.[7] Whether consciously on Coleridge's part or not, she argues, they contain hidden depths.

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[1] Heidi, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 6.

[2] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 233.

[3] Earl Leslie Griggs, 'Notes Concerning Certain Poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge', *Modern Language Notes*, 69 (1954): p. 29.

[4] *Poems*, i. p. 365.

In evidencing this claim, however, her purpose (like Worthen's) is not to outline a broader theory about how the epigrams were conceived and what this can reveal about Coleridge's evolving attitude to satire, but rather to shed light on the details of his private life that manifest themselves in his public poetry. Though the latter certainly has an important impact on the former, it is only in the broader context of Coleridge's satirical writing across the 1790s that the true significance of the epigrams to his satirical development begins to come into view (both Worthen's and Thomson's studies begin after 1798, and thus do not take this into account). The timescale of their composition is central to an understanding of this significance. Though Coleridge wrote a small handful of epigrams before 1798, the vast majority were composed during and after his time in Germany in 1798 and 1799. This was a period in which, as Maximiliaan Van Woudenberg has detailed, Coleridge was open to a wide range of new influences, none more important, as far as his satire is concerned, than the writings of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.[8]

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[5] *Poems*, i. p. lxxxviii.

[6] John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons & the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 261.

[7] Heidi, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 100.

[8] Maximiliaan van Woudenberg, 'Coleridge's Literary Studies at Göttingen in 1799: Reconsidering the Library Borrowings from the University of Göttingen', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 21 (2003): pp. 66-80.

Many of the epigrams Coleridge eventually published in the *Morning Post* were originally adapted or translated from Lessing's *Sinngedichte*. Mostly drafted in Coleridge's notebooks, probably whilst still in Germany, these adaptations reveal a profound engagement with Lessing's writings on the epigram as a form, writings that Coleridge had been studying in depth in preparation for his projected biography of Lessing. Focusing not only on Coleridge's adaptations of German epigrams, but also on satirical pieces that display the influence of Lessing's thought on the subject of the epigram, this chapter will argue that the German critic provided Coleridge with a framework for thinking about the satirical tendencies he had developed over the course of the 1790s. Similarly sceptical about satire's negative ramifications, Lessing articulates a satirical strategy that ultimately affirms what had previously often been almost instinctive, certainly unspoken, propensities in Coleridge's satire.

6.1

Coleridge was not proud of his epigrams. Writing to Tom Wedgwood in 1802, he described those he had sent to the editor of the *Morning Post* as

> wretched indeed, but they answered Stuart's purpose better than better things—/ I ought not to have given any signature to them whatsoever.[1]

Though he dismisses all his poetry for the *Post* (as 'merely the emptying out of my Desk' to fill up the poetry section), special embarrassment seems reserved here for the epigrams.[2] They are, it is true, very different in tone and style from much of what Coleridge had published to date, not least in their petty hostility. Lampooning the 'ideot face' of one target, and the 'ruddy [...] nose' of another, the epigrams' sentiments stand in stark contrast to those satirical attacks Coleridge actively sought to preserve, like the Shakespearean apocalyptic critique of British foreign policy in 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter'. For the most part, critics have accepted Coleridge's explanation to Tom Wedgwood, agreeing that the epigrams were simply 'easy copy', and 'charitably' declining to draw too much attention to them.[3] Whether or not they were published purely for pecuniary reasons, however, their composition, often based on translated Greek, Latin, and German epigrams, nevertheless illuminates much regarding his opinion of satire more broadly. Focusing particularly on his significant debts to Gotthold Lessing's critical work on epigrams earlier in the century, it may be proposed that the epigrams Coleridge published in the *Morning Post* between 1797 and 1802 represent the culmination of a process of contemplation about the function and purpose of satire, one that sheds light on, rather than detracts from, his lengthier and better-known works of the period.

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[1] *CL*, ii. p. 876. It is unclear whether Coleridge refers to all his epigrams for the *Post*, or just his most recent batch. Carl Woodring takes the comment as an indictment of all Coleridge's 'known epigrams'. Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 235.

[2] *CL*, ii. 876.

[3] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 100; Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 235.

Coleridge often draws on classical epigrams in his own writing. The earliest of them were largely dedicatory, making direct reference, as in this Archaic example (from c. 530 B.C.), to the memorials and statues on which they were inscribed:

> Halt and show pity beside the monument of dead Kroisos,
> whom raging Ares once destroyed in the front rank of the battle.[4]

As epigrams lost their attachment to particular objects, and the form was taken up by poets in later centuries, such commands to grieve found their successors in moral commands and critiques.[5] Martial in particular became known in the first century A.D. for his caustic verse, usually directed at specific named individuals:

> Quintus loves Thais. Which Thais? Thais the half-blind.
> Thais is missing one eye; he's missing both.[6]

The focus here is on the acerbity of the wit, although, as Lawrence Manley suggests, the two models—early Greek and Roman—could be said to share a common motive, with '[t]he impulse to immortalize by inscription [echoing] the satiric impulse to fix a neat, indelible image in a last, unanswerable word'.[7] It is this latter more satirical model, not to mention Martial himself, that gained particular popularity in early modern England, maintaining a strong influence on epigrammatists well into the eighteenth century.[8]

Before 1797, however, Coleridge seems to steer deliberately clear of this influence. In 1792, whilst a student at Cambridge, he participated in the university's recently instituted Latin and Greek poetry competition, named after its founder William Browne. Coleridge had, as he informs his brother, 'been writing for *all* the prizes—namely—the Greek Ode, the Latin Ode, and the Epigrams', duly going on to win the first of them.[9] The letter makes clear, however, that he had at least attempted to write one epigram 'after the model of Martial' (as the Browne Medal's terms stipulate), although this effort is not mentioned in his correspondence again.[10] Instead, Coleridge's later writing contains several implicit criticisms of the genre he had once attempted. In late 1794, he communicates his disapproval to Southey of an anonymous derogatory epigram directed at a volume of poetry published by Charles Le Grice, labelling the attack 'an obtuse acute angle of wit'.[11] Though only a brief comment, the dual tack of Coleridge's description reveals an underlying ambivalence in his attitude to the epigram. On the one hand he criticises it for its technical failings, suggesting that its obtuseness makes it 'almost as bad as the subject' (namely Le Grice's poems, which Coleridge had also critiqued).[12] Simultaneously, however, he also takes issue with the 'acute' quality of the attack. Though already denounced for its technical flaws, the epigram's acerbity requires its own specific condemnation.

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[4] Original text:

> στεθι καˆὶ οἴκτιρον Κροίσο παρὰ σεμα θανˆόντος
> hόν ποτ' ἐνὶ προμάχοις ὄλεσε θô ρος Ἄρες'.

Carmina Epigraphica Graeca (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), p. 27.

[5] The exact relationship between these two forms of epigram is disputed. See Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 416.

[6] Original text:

> Thaida Quintus amat. quam Thaida? Thaida luscam.
> unum oculum Thais non habet, ille duos.

Martial, *Epigrams*, trans. Gideon Nisbet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 42-43.

[7] Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London*, p. 416.

[8] Frederick Will, 'The Epigram or Lapidary Engravings', *The Antioch Review*, 40 (1982): 157.

Such a condemnation is not unique among Coleridge's correspondence of this period. In another letter to Southey from earlier that year, discussed in detail in Chapter One, he describes an encounter with the mayor of Cambridge:

> [he] would certainly be a Pantisocrat, were his head & heart as highly illuminated as his Face. [...] In the tropical Latitudes of this fellow's Nose was I obliged to fry—I wish, you would write a lampoon upon him—in me it would be unchristian Revenge![13]

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[9] *CL*, i. p. 34.

[10] Laurence A. Brown, *A Catalogue of British Historical Medals 1760–1960, Vol. I: The Accession of George III to the Death of William IV*, 3 vols (London: Seaby Publications Ltd, 1980), i. p. 21.

[11] *CL* i., p.135-36. The full epigram, appended to Coleridge's letter, reads as follows:

A Tiny Man of tiny Wit
A Tiny book has publish'd—
But not—alas! one tiny Bit
His tiny Fame establish'd.'

[12] *CL,* i. p. 135.

[13] *CL*, i. p. 110.

A different sort of ambivalence is present here. Coleridge clearly feels that the mayor deserves satirising, but is at the same time conscious that, as a Christian (unlike Southey, who leant towards atheism), he should not indulge in mean-spirited personal abuse.[14] This makes particular sense in light of the 'preoccupation with revenge' discerned by Peter Kitson in Coleridge's writing of this time.[15] In the wake of the violent retribution of the Terror, Coleridge on multiple occasions prefaced his condemnations of the British government with explicit warnings about the desire for vengeance (of the kind that had made the 'Altar of Freedom stream with blood' in France).[16] His 1795 political pamphlet *Conciones ad Populum*, for instance, urges readers to 'beware that we be not transported into revenge while we are levelling the loathsome Pile [the Temple of Despotism]'.[17] After establishing this threat of a corruptive desire for vengeance, *Conciones* proceeds to its central argument that Christian 'general Benevolence' is the best tool by which such feelings may be tempered and suppressed.[18] Viewed in the context of this argument, Coleridge's suppression of his own desire for 'unchristian Revenge' upon the mayor of Cambridge coheres with his political and moral convictions. Though only a light-hearted aside, his language suggests that even something so petty as a lampoon on the appearance of a local official constitutes an indulgence of an immoral inclination, one that had under different circumstances led to the Terror.

It is so much the more surprising, then, that Coleridge's first epigrams for the *Morning Post*, produced just two years after *Conciones*, are so personal and vengeful (much more so than the melodramatically impersonal condemnations of Pitt in 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter'). 'On Deputy — —', the first epigram Coleridge sent to the paper's editor Daniel Stuart, serves as a case in point:

> By many a booby's vengeance bit,
> I leave your haunts, ye sons of wit!
> And swear by Heaven's blessed light,

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[14] Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.129.

[15] Peter Kitson, 'Coleridge, the French Revolution, and "The Ancient Mariner": Collective Guilt and Individual Salvation', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 19 (1989): p. 201.

[16] *Lects 1795*, p. 38.

[17] *Lects 1795*, p. 48.

[18] *Lects 1795*, p. 46.

> That Epigrams no more I'll write.
> Now hang that ***** for an ass,
> Thus to thrust in his ideot face
> Which, spite of oaths, if e'er I spy,
> I write an Epigram—or die.[19]

Published on 2 January 1798, the epigram lampoons this (untraced) local official's appearance in exactly the way Coleridge had condemned in his letter to Southey. Adapted from an epigram by Palladas, a Greek poet of the fourth century A.D., the central elements of 'On Deputy — —' are a fairly faithful verse translation of the original, which targets not a deputy but the 'Paphlagonian Pantagathus'.[20] As Carl Woodring points out, however, Coleridge also expands the epigram by introducing perhaps its most scathing aspects, namely the comparison to 'an ass', and the line deriding the deputy's 'ideot face'.[21] These additions go even further than the comparatively gentle parody of his friends in the Higginbottom sonnets, and are almost suggestive of a conscious attempt to commit the very fault he had so frequently warned against, indulging as they do a malevolent inclination to ridicule even within the confines of an epigram specifically framed, in its opening line, as a repudiation of such 'vengeance' in others.

Woodring does not quite know what to make of the added lines. 'I have [not] been able', he writes, 'to ascertain the political use of this tweak', proposing that the *Morning Post* epigrams as a group were merely carelessly written doggerel 'ground out with displeasure' at Stuart's request.[22] Such a view rests largely on Coleridge's contemporary correspondence, which makes clear that he was unsatisfied with the demands of writing to order for a daily newspaper. Just a few weeks after he had been engaged as a regular contributor, and only three days after the publication of 'On Deputy — —', Coleridge lamented his situation to Josiah Wedgwood:

> nothing scarcely that has not a *tang* of personality or *vindictive* feeling, is pleasing or interesting, I apprehend, to my Employers.[23]

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[19] *Poems*, i. 423.
[20] *The Greek Anthology*, trans. W. R. Paton (London: William Heinemann, 1916), pp. 228-29.
[21] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 233.
[22] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 235.
[23] *CL*, i. p. 365.

Read with this in mind, the attack on the deputy, despite the concealment of his identity, may be put down simply to the need to satisfy Stuart’s desire for ‘*vindictive* feeling’. The fact that Coleridge never anthologised the piece (or indeed mentioned it again) similarly suggests that he did not claim its sentiments as his own, and was not overly proud of the work. For Zachary Leader, only the conditions of anonymity and (intended) ephemerality explain why Coleridge felt able to publish it at all, allowing him to consider ‘[s]uch poems safe from criticism because they were not really poems, not appearing in a book [...] with Coleridge’s name on it’.[24] The contradiction between the vindictiveness of ‘On Deputy ——’ and his earlier comments about vengeful writing makes perfect sense in this light. As was the case in several of his other satires of this period (discussed in the preceding chapters), it was a contradiction produced not by choice but necessity, and Coleridge made every effort to distance himself from a work so contradictory to his principles.

Though a reasonable judgement of Coleridge’s feelings after the fact, this reading overlooks the nuances within the epigram itself. Among these the most notable have their roots in the work Coleridge chose to adapt. Palladas, who was a prolific epigrammatist, had a tendency to focus on the harmful effects of his own satirical mode, even in the midst of employing it (much like Horace). Characterising his poetry, Tom Hawkins asserts that its aggression ‘goes hand in hand with self-abuse and abjection’, focusing on the epigram on the Paphlagonian Pantagathus (i.e. Coleridge’s source text) as a case in point.[25] For Hawkins, this piece typifies Palladas’ perception of the need to ‘purge himself of the hate-engendering poetry that wells up inside him’, though he is unable, as the last line of the epigram emphasises, to ‘repress the malady’ (‘στέξαι τὴν νόσον οὐ δύναμαι’).[26] Given Palladas’ consciousness of the harmful effects of his own vindictive verse, Coleridge’s choice of epigram suggests a deeper acknowledgement of his earlier views than critical commentaries have hitherto indicated. Indeed, he goes as far as to change particular details to bring out this coherence. Where for Palladas the urge to satirise is a 'malady' ('νόσον'), for Coleridge it is sworn against by 'Heaven's blessed light': from a physical sickness it has become a moral failing, one just as 'unchristian' (as the reference to heaven implies) as it had been in his 1794 letter to Southey. As such, though the throwaway reference to the target's 'ideot face' might initially suggest the 'spirit of frivolous joking' that J. C. C. Mays discerns in Coleridge's epigrams, the framework within which it appears points to deeper reflection.[27]

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[24] Zachary Leader, ‘Coleridge and the Uses of Journalism’, in *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower*, ed. Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 32. For a full discussion of the Laberius pseudonym see Chapter Five.

[25] Tom Hawkins, *Iambic Poetics in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 182.

[26] Hawkins, *Iambic Poetics in the Roman Empire*, p. 183; *Poems*, i. p. 423.

Given the poem's pseudonymous publication, this coherence with his earlier views would not have been apparent to contemporary *Morning Post* readers. Yet by using the same pseudonym under which 'Parliamentary Oscillators' and 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' were published, Coleridge nonetheless signals a consistent attitude within his *Morning Post* satirical writing of this period. 'Laberius', with its reference to the humiliated Roman satirist (discussed in Chapter Five), perfectly encapsulates Coleridge's subtle protest against his editor's desire for vindictive newspaper verse. As with 'Parliamentary Oscillators' and 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', Coleridge flags up yet again the 'fall' with which the name Laberius is etymologically associated in Latin, hinting that he has fallen from, or failed to live up to, his own principles. Though not published under his own name, 'On Deputy — —' may thus be viewed as part of a concerted attempt to flag up his distaste for the kind of poetry he was required to publish.

Though this attempt may indeed have been discerned by some contemporary readers of the *Morning Post* (as the message could perhaps be detectable despite the anonymity), the epigrams also suggest the presence of a more private reflection on the implications of his satire. Heidi Thomson's recent work on *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper* has shown the extent to which such private concerns manifested themselves in Coleridge's public poetry. In making this case for the epigrams, Thomson turns to his 'Epigram on a Supposed Son', published in the *Morning Post* on 5 February 1800 (but most likely adapted a few months earlier from an original by the seventeenth-century German poet Friedrich von Logau):

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[27] *Poems*, i. p. lxxxviii

> Billy Brown, how like his Father!
> Mr. Brown, indeed, says No.
> Mrs. Brown too, who knows better,
> Says the same, *but thinks not so!*[28]

J. C. C. Mays sets out a political interpretation of the piece, proposing that it refers to William ‘Billy’ Pitt’s so-called ‘Brown Bread Act’, which regulated bread production in response to a grain shortage (much like that which had confronted his father).[29] Though Thomson does not contradict Mays’ suggestion, she discerns an underlying personal relevance. For her, the poem reflects Coleridge’s emotional ambivalence upon learning of his wife’s new pregnancy whilst he was becoming increasingly drawn to another woman: Sara Hutchinson. Mr. Brown’s apparent rejection of the child, under such a reading, reflects Coleridge’s ‘confidence in his own paternity in the physical sense, while at the same time feeling emotionally distant from his wife’.[30] In this way private meditation can be found beneath public satire, though only a small handful of contemporary readers would have been in a position to detect it.

Like ‘On Deputy — —’, then, Coleridge’s ‘Epigram on a Supposed Son’ is founded not just on private reflection, but on a sense of personal wrongdoing. This much is obvious when the piece is compared to its German source text, a nearly identical epigram by Logau that differs principally in the mother’s unspoken confirmation of the father’s doubts in the final line (implying it is she, rather than he, who has been unfaithful).[31] Just as ‘On Deputy — —’ tempers its satirical attack by casting aspersions on its own methods, so Coleridge’s alteration weakens the bite of the source text’s attack on adultery in order to implicate himself. If satire for Coleridge is ‘unchristian Revenge’, then such a move finds a striking parallel in the biblical account of Christ’s intervention in the stoning of a woman accused of adultery. ‘He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' Christ commands the crowd, and rather than pen an attack upon adultery himself, Coleridge similarly looks to his sins, moderating an 'unchristian' impulse to satirise with an element of self-reproach.[32]

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[28] *Poems*, ii. p. 597.

[29] *Poems*, ii. p. 597.

[30] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 100.

[31] See Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 100.

Once discerned, such attempts to temper his satire are visible throughout the epigrams. Though a largely faithful adaptation of a piece by Christian Wernicke, the 'Epigram on a Reader of his Own Verses' (and particularly Coleridge's choice of language in adapting it) similarly echoes private concerns:

> Hoarse Mævius reads his hobbling verse
> To all, and at all times,
> And deems them both divinely smooth,
> His voice as well as rhymes.
>
> But folks say Mævius is no Ass;
> But Mævius makes it clear,
> That he's a monster of an Ass,
> An Ass without an ear.[33]

Written in May 1799 and published in the *Morning Post* in September, the epigram presents itself as a generic jeu d'esprit, targeting as it does the proverbial Mævius (a name associated with bad poetry in Virgil and Horace).[34] Beneath this ostensible non-specificity, however, the piece reflects Coleridge's own self-doubts and anxieties, much like 'Epigram on a Supposed Son'.

Coleridge's use of the word 'hobbling' in the first line (rather than 'rough', which would have been the straightforward translation of Wernicke's 'rauhen') may be attributed to more than a metrical incentive, and is helpful in exposing the poem's underlying self-criticism.[35] On 6 May 1799, around the time he was composing the epigram, Coleridge sent a letter to Thomas Poole in which he prefixes a short poem on homesickness with a self-effacing note: 'I dittied the following hobbling Ditty; but my poor

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[32] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 126.

[33] *Poems*, ii. p. 555.

[34] *Poems*, ii. p. 555.

[35] Christian Wernicke, *Poetische Versuche in Überschriften; Wie auch in Helden und Schäfergedichten* (Zurich: David Geßner, 1749), p. 232.

Muse is quite gone'.[36] The comment suggests an underlying verbal association in Coleridge's mind between his epigrammatic disparagement of Mævius and his own perceived poetic failings. Developing a position laid out by Paul Magnuson, Monika Class argues that this self-doubt and increasingly '[low] self-esteem' (also evident in his dismissals of his verse as 'dull') can in part be attributed to the vociferous public castigation he was contemporarily facing.[37] As well as condemning his politics, the *Anti-Jacobin*'s 'New Morality' and Gillray's subsequent caricature of the same name (the most notorious examples of this castigation) had echoed earlier criticisms of Coleridge's 'not always harmonious' verse (as one 1796 reviewer put it).[38] The palpable sarcasm of the *Anti-Jacobin*'s description of the 'harmony' (implicitly both social and poetic) of Coleridge and Southey's circle reflects such critiques, and is picked up in Gillray's representation of the pair not only singing from different hymn sheets, but doing so in the form of inharmoniously braying asses (most likely a reference to Coleridge's 'To A Young Ass', as most critical discussions have pointed out).[39] If, as Class concludes, this cumulative criticism had dented Coleridge's confidence, then it is reasonable to suspect that the 'Epigram on a Reader of his Own Verses' served as something of an outlet for his self-doubt. Tacitly connecting Mævius' 'hobbling' verse with his own in the first line, he reflects a growing sense that he himself, like the epigram's apparent target, might also be 'a monster of an Ass, / An Ass without an ear'.[40]

The self-deprecating quality of Coleridge's epigrams can help to account for other poems of this period that modern commentators have often struggled to explain. 'The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone' in particular has prompted many bewildered attempts to justify the apparent vitriol of its attack on James Mackintosh, the Scottish lawyer and brother-in-law of Daniel Stuart. The poem itself, published in the *Morning Post* in late 1800, is vague as to its motivations, depicting for the most part not the target himself but 'The Dev'l and his Grannam' sitting in the snow on Mackintosh's imagined tomb, waiting to take him to Hell on the Day of Judgement. The tomb motif was common to several epigrams Coleridge had drafted over the previous months, though these instances are less specific in their application than 'The Two Round Spaces', which provides the clearest identification of its subject in its most caustic lines:

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[36] *CL*, i. p. 493.

[37] Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, p. 79; Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796-1817: Coleridge's Responses to German Philosophy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 112-23; *CL*, i. p. 552.

[38] 'Review in *Analytical Review*, 1796', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage, Volume 1, 1794-1834*, ed. J. R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols (London and New York: Routledge, 1968), i. p. 33.

[39] *Anti-Jacobin; or, Weekly Examiner*, ii. p. 636. See for example David Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 178.

[40] A similar reading could be proposed for several other pieces in which asses' ears play a prominent role, including 'To a Well-Known Musical Critic, Remarkable for his Ears Sticking Thro' His Hair'. *Poems*, i. pp. 427-28.

> This Fellow from Aberdeen hither did skip
> With a waxy face & a blabber lip
> And a black tooth in front, to shew in part
> What was the colour of his whole heart.[41]

Most critical accounts agree on at least three possible motivations for this extremely personal attack, among the harshest and most personal of all Coleridge's satirical writings. First, Mackintosh had been critical of Wordsworth's poetry, and there is some speculation that he might be the addressee of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*' motto ('How absolutely not after your liking, O learned jurist!').[42] Second, he had got the better of Coleridge in an argument on 'poetry, religion, ethics, &c.' with his 'sharp cut-and-thrust fencing' (as Daniel Stuart recalled), humiliating him in front of Tom Wedgwood.[43] Third, and perhaps most significantly, he had in an 1800 lecture renounced the support for France he had voiced in his 1791 *Vindicae Gallicae* (subtitled 'A Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers'), in a manner that for Coleridge amounted to 'gratuitous sneering at his former friends' (as Patrick J. Keane puts it).[44] Clearly then Coleridge had at least some cause for disliking his target.

Yet it is the severity of the poem, rather than its motivation, that has proved most perplexing. Thomas Hutchinson finds the poem 'ludicrously vehement', whilst John Beer writes that even 'Among the cases where Coleridge's behaviour could be contradictory [...] this is an extreme example'.[45] Beer's conception of self-contradiction strikes at the heart of the matter, and can, at least to a certain extent, account for the unusually harsh tone of 'The Two Round Spaces'. Coleridge is, in essence, condemning Mackintosh for an act that he himself was in the process of committing: namely, recantation. His repudiation in 'France: an Ode' of that 'adulterous, blind' country, whose citizens and leaders 'mix with Kings in the low lust of sway, / Yell in the hunt, and share the murd'rous prey', parallels Mackintosh's own (unpublished) 1800 lectures, in which he had sought, as he later put it,

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[41] *Poems*, ii. pp. 642; see for instance *CN*, i. 442.

[42] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 152; Beer, *Coleridge's Play of Mind*, p. 41.

[43] See *Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments*, ed. and intro. Richard Armour and Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1940), pp. 346-47.

[44] Patrick J. Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* (Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), p. 284.

> to profess publicly and unequivocally, that I abhor, abjure, and for ever renounce the French revolution, with all its sanguinary history, its abominable principles, and for ever execrable leaders.[46]

Though by all accounts Mackintosh's recantation was the more vehement (disparaging figures like Godwin alongside France's 'execrable leaders'), their essential similarity on so central an issue certainly could not have escaped Coleridge.[47] The crucial fault he discerns in Mackintosh—that of being a turncoat—was one to which, as Beer puts it, he 'cannot have been altogether unsympathetic'.[48]

In this context Coleridge may be seen to bring out their overarching similarity by focusing on more specific parallels between himself and his target. Chief among these are the descriptions of Mackintosh's appearance, and particularly his 'black tooth'. On the face of it the detail seems simply to refer to the fact that Mackintosh 'had had one of his front teeth broken and the stump was black' (as Daniel Stuart later explained). Yet the image also bears a striking resemblance to Coleridge's descriptions of his own appearance. As he reported to Joseph Cottle (and mentioned again to Josiah Wade and his brother George), he himself suffered from an infected ‘stump of a tooth’ which could not be removed and which had on occasion had him ‘confined to my bed’ in ‘anguish’.[49] Though the description of Mackintosh’s ‘waxy face and blabber lip’ also echoes Coleridge’s accounts of his own appearance (for instance his description to Thelwall of ‘my mouth, [which] with sensual thick lips, is almost always open’), it is the reference to the blackened tooth, which ‘shew[s] in part / What was the colour of his whole heart’, that is potentially most revealing.[50]

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[45] William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Duckworth and Co., 1920), p. lviii; Beer, *Coleridge's Play of Mind*, p. 39. Kenneth Johnston also discerns this hint of hypocrisy, in Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 209.

[46] S. T. Coleridge, *Fears in Solitude, Written in 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion. To which are added, France, an Ode; and Frost at Midnight* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), p. 17; *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh*, ed. R. J. Mackintosh, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1836), i. p. 125.

[47] On the violence of Mackintosh's lectures see Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), p. 259.

[48] Beer, *Coleridge's Play of Mind*, p. 40.

Just as Coleridge shared Mackintosh’s physical afflictions, so he felt that he suffered from similar moral flaws.[51] These flaws were however more complicated than a sense simply of being a turncoat, or of ‘sneering at his former friends’ (though Coleridge had done plenty of that). Both Peter Kitson and Patrick Keane contend that several guilty preoccupations were weighing on Coleridge’s mind at this time. On the one hand he was, as Kitson puts it, ‘convinced of the depth of his own country’s guilt’, and felt associated with its role in the chaos and bloodshed over the channel.[52] At the same time, Keane argues that Coleridge felt a sense of ‘guilt stemming from his fearful retreat from his commitment to liberty in the face of domestic repression’ (a retreat discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis).[53] This is not to mention the guilt he felt at the issues in his marriage and his burgeoning relationship with Sara Hutchinson. The result was the nightmarish vision of oppressive personal and collective guilt articulated in poems like ‘The Pains of Sleep’ and the ‘Ancient Mariner’, which are dominated by overwhelming impressions of unutterable wrongdoing and remorse. This complicated guilt was bound up with a conception of mankind’s ‘inherent depravity’ that finds frequent expression in Coleridge’s accounts of ‘an aching hollowness in the bosom, a dark cold speck at the heart [...] that must be kept *out of sight* of the conscience’.[54] This sense of common inward depravity, underlying all the circumstantial guilt he feels he has accumulated, fundamentally alters the spirit of the condemnation of Mackintosh in ‘The Two Round Spaces’. Not only did Coleridge share his physical ailments, but he also felt himself similarly morally compromised: his own heart, he worried, might be as black as that of his victim.

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[49] *CL*, i. pp. 390, 394, 401.
[50] *CL*, i. p. 260.
[51] *CL*, i. p. 401.
[52] Kitson, ‘Coleridge, the French Revolution, and “The Ancient Mariner”’, p. 205.
[53] Keane, *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics*, p. 271.
[54] *CL*, i. p. 396; S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 9. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 24.

The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone’ thus achieves a similar effect to Coleridge’s epigrams. As in the ‘Epigram on a Reader of his Own Verses’ and ‘On Deputy — —’, he appears to inject personal anxieties and self-critiques into what initially seems a fairly simple and spontaneous, if vitriolic, lampoon. Set alongside Coleridge’s reflections on the ‘inherent depravity’ of mankind, this approach might be read as a recognition that all individuals are worthy of criticism, and that no satirist is so without sin that they might cast the first stone. This is not to validate Coleridge’s retrospective protestations, years later, that ‘I never had other than kind feelings towards Mackintosh all my life’.[55] Plainly Coleridge did dislike Mackintosh, as Beer and others have shown, but his attack is nevertheless tempered by a consciousness of his own failings, and his unsuitability to make such a critique.

In this sense, Coleridge’s self-reflexive epigrammatic verse echoes the way in which he had drawn on Horace’s highly self-aware satirical ambivalence in previous years. Yet unlike, for instance, *The Watchman*’s perplexing and openly contradictory satire, Coleridge’s self-criticisms in his 1799 and 1800 *Morning Post* epigrammatic verse are essentially private reflections. The fact that only a few close friends (if that) could have discerned their significance suggests a more personal impulse on Coleridge’s part, one not calculated to alter the attitudes of his readers as his *Watchman* satire had done. As such, these underlying self-criticisms could perhaps give the impression of a form of private repentance for indulging in satire’s ‘unchristian Revenge’, rather than an active warning about its moral risks (of the kind he had voiced earlier in the decade). As the next section will demonstrate, however, such an interpretation is not altogether so straightforward to maintain.

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[55] Beer, *Coleridge’s Play of Mind*, p. 51.

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If Coleridge was indeed so keen to recognise his own unsuitability to write such verse, one might ask why he decided to produce it in the first place. Though the claim that he was merely reluctantly and self-critically fulfilling Daniel Stuart's desire for satirical verse with '*vindictive* feeling' might hold true in some cases, there are many others in which it appears more suspect. 'The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone' for instance was, according to Coleridge's later account, composed 'in mere sport' on his own initiative.[1] Four decades later, Stuart (Mackintosh's brother-in-law) remembered having rejected it for publication, though in actual fact he published it without the six lines that identified the target (namely those surrounding the reference to the blackened tooth).[2] Either way, it is clear that the poem was not written at Stuart's behest. The same is also true of a large number of epigrams, many of which were composed privately in Coleridge's notebooks in 1799, not during his tenure under Stuart, and well before their eventual submission to the *Morning Post* the following year. Thus, whilst Coleridge does appear to be tempering his epigrammatic satire with admissions of personal guilt, this cannot solely be explained as a subtle attempt to subvert a mode he had doubts about, and which he had been forced to employ. This section argues that, viewed in the context of his contemporary reading, and especially his growing interest in Lessing (who wrote at length on epigrams), a new set of motivations begins to come into view. Rather than reflecting a private sense of guilt, the epigrams' apparent self-criticisms in fact represent a deliberate experimentation with the genre, one that represents a culmination of the views about satire he had developed over the 1790s.

It is worth noting that the self-referential quality of Coleridge's epigrams and epigrammatic verse does not always constitute self-critique. 'The Devil's Thoughts', composed with Southey in late 1799, illustrates this side to Coleridge's satirical self-reflexivity.[3] The poem is made up of a series of stanzas without an obvious causal narrative progression, following the Devil as he walks contentedly through a corrupt and sinful world. In their lack of any clearly signalled connection to one another, either causative or thematic, each stanza has the appearance of a standalone epigram, targeting specific (though unnamed) individuals with humorous jibes and puns. The final stanza is a good example of this. Its opening reference to 'General ——'s burning face', which prompts the Devil to return to Hell, sets up the epigrammatic pun in the closing revelation that 'the Devil thought, by a slight mistake, / It was General Conflagration'.[4] As David Erdmann speculates (supported by Carl Woodring), this is possibly a reference to Ralph Abercromby, the British Army commander responsible for quashing the Irish rebellion (though as George Whalley outlines, there are many other possible contenders).[5] Whoever the true target may be, the piece thus functions in much the same way as Coleridge's epigram 'On Deputy — —': it is a standalone unit, humorously undermining a specific anonymous (and in both cases titled) individual.

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[1] See *CPW*, i. p. 354.

[2] 'The Two Round Spaces. A Skeltoniad.' *Morning Post* [London], 4 Dec. 1800, p. 3. British Library Newspapers, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/Z2000985052/GDCS?u=duruni&sid=GDCS&xid=d8046185. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020; *CPW*, i, p. 354.

That Coleridge thought of these stanzas as individual units is borne out in the way they draw upon isolated and unrelated occurrences in his own life. The fifth stanza's meeting between the Devil and a bookseller illustrates this particularly clearly:

> He went into a rich bookseller's shop,
> Quoth he, We are both of one college,
> For I sate myself like a cormorant once
> Upon the Tree of Knowledge.[6]

The wording distinctly echoes an encounter Coleridge had had just a few weeks earlier. As Clement Carlyon records, a German student at Göttingen had asked Coleridge to contribute a short piece to his commonplace book, a request Coleridge obliged with a quatrain:

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[3] Except where otherwise stated, the following discussion will focus on those stanzas composed by Coleridge.
[4] *Poems*, i. p. 566-67.
[5] *EOT*, ii. p. 43; Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 148; George Whalley, *Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson and the Asra Poems* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 22-23.
[6] *Poems*, i. p. 564.

> We both attended the same College,
> Where sheets of paper we did blur many,
> And now we're going to sport our knowledge,
> In England I, and you in Germany.[7]

The similarities here could be dismissed simply as Coleridge unthinkingly repeating himself or borrowing from previous lines that he did not expect to be preserved. Yet a more conscious self-reflexivity is suggested by the inclusion of another personal reference, in the Devil's description of himself as a 'cormorant'. Distinctly echoing Coleridge's account of himself, in a letter to Thelwall, as a 'library-cormorant', this second private allusion within so short a passage is suggestive of an effort to draw on individual scenes from his personal experience.[8]

Whilst these apparent allusions may be dismissed as coincidence, or lazy repurposing, there are still others that appear more consciously included. The cryptic reference in the third stanza to a 'lawyer killing a viper' (that puts the Devil 'in mind / of the story of Cain and Abel') is one such instance. It has been largely overlooked in critical commentaries, and when it is discussed there is a tendency for it to be dismissed as a generic allegory. Woodring for instance briefly associates the stanza with Blake's 'clear fire', implying it to be a more general critique of the legal system equivalent to the 'charter'd street[s]' in 'London'.[9]

Yet this does not explain why, if such a critique was intended, Coleridge chose to depict the lawyer killing a viper, rather than a more benign symbol of justice or liberty. In late 1799, around the time of the poem's composition, a notebook entry made by Coleridge about Mackintosh (who was himself a successful lawyer) gestures towards a possible explanation:

> Mackintosh intertrudes, not introduces his beauties. Nothing grows out of his main argument but much is shoved between—each digression occasions a move backward to find the road again—like a sick man he recoils after every affection. The Serpent by which the ancients emblem'd the Inventive faculty appears to me, in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of

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[7] Clement Carlyon, *Early Years and Late Reflections* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1836), pp. 67-68; *Poems*, i. p. 543.

[8] *CL*, i. p. 260

[9] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, p. 145.

> Genius. He varies his course yet still glides onwards—all lines of motion are his—all beautiful, & all propulsive—.[10]

Where ‘The Devil’s Thoughts’ presents a battle between a viper and an unnamed lawyer, this notebook entry opposes a named lawyer with a symbolic serpent. Given that they were written at around the same time, it is possible to read both as part of a continued meditation on the verbal duels with Mackintosh that had so affected Coleridge.[11] Indeed he may even be tacitly referring to himself in ‘The Devil’s Thoughts’, comparing his reasoning to the inventive and propulsive viper, savaged by the unimaginative, though nimble, lawyer. This would certainly echo Stuart’s account of one of those meetings, in which Coleridge’s digressive and monologue-like style of argument was ‘speedily confused and subdued’ by the ‘sharp cut-and-thrust fencing [of] a master like Mackintosh’.[12] Thus whilst to the general reader the image might suggest a generic (though somewhat unclear) Blakean critique of the legal system, for Coleridge it appears to have been rooted in recent experience.

Personal relevance of this kind is visible even in lines nominally contributed by Southey (though Coleridge’s later memory, on which the attribution is based, could have misremembered his exact role in them).[13] Most striking among these is the poem’s opening introduction to the Devil:

> From his brimstone bed at break of day,
> A walking the devil is gone.[14]

On 25 September 1799, again coinciding with the poem’s composition, Coleridge wrote to Southey informing him of his son’s infection with scabies (and his own fear of contracting it). The disease was treated, as Coleridge describes, by the application of sulphur:

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[10] *CN*, i. 609.

[11] On the context to these interactions see Chapter Six, Section One above, and Beer, *Coleridge’s Play of Mind*, p. 41.

[12] *Elia. Essays which Have Appeared Under that Signature in the London Magazine* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823), p. 48; *Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments*, ed. and intro. Richard Armour and Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1940), pp. 346-47.

[13] *Poems*, i. pp. 560-61.

[14] *EOT*, i. p. cxlvi; *Poems*, i. p. 561.

> I doubt not, that all will be well by tomorrow or at farthest next day—for he [Hartley] slept quiet & has never once scratched himself since his Embrimstonement.[15]

This note (and several further references to brimstone) suggests that Coleridge's house at Nether Stowey had at that time become, in its own way, a hotbed of brimstone that recalls the poem's opening description of Hell.[16] Viewing it in this personal context, one is increasingly prompted to suppose that the majority of the poem's apparently unrelated scenes are connected by the single fact that they had recently happened to Coleridge.[17]

The question, then, is why? Though in places the poem's self-reflexivity may be compared with the intimations of personal guilt in a piece like 'The Two Round Spaces', the overall effect is somewhat different. Whilst 'The Devil's Thoughts' does appear to draw an essential parallel between Coleridge and the Devil, suggesting a sense of sinfulness, this parallel does not always amount to an admission of guilt. Often, as in the mentions of brimstone or college attendance, the personal references cannot be described as sins or even faults. Furthermore, the fact that they are so ubiquitous (appearing even in Southey's stanzas) implies a concerted effort to introduce them. Though she does not comment specifically on 'The Devil's Thoughts' in this context, Heidi Thomson has argued that Coleridge's broader inclusion of private concerns in his public poetry reflects a 'compulsive' tendency to draw on 'his troubles [for] his poetic inspiration'.[18] For a poem like 'Dejection' (which Thomson's study was 'inspired by'), such a reading certainly makes sense: Coleridge's private emotion here, as William Ulmer suggests, lends the poem a charged 'confessional' quality.[19] Yet it is harder to make this case for 'The Devil's Thoughts', with its mostly trivial and oblique references that often render the poem more obscure, rather than lending it greater emotional resonance.

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[15] *CL*, i. p. 530.

[16] *CL*, i. pp. 532, 536.

[17] Another private reference may be found in the Devil's visit to '— — fields' (Cold Bath Fields prison), which echoes Coleridge's own recent visit to the site in order to report on its conditions for the *Morning Post*. *EOT*, i. p. cxlvi.

[18] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, pp. 4, 11.

[19] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 4; William A. Ulmer, 'Radical Similarity: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Dejection Dialogue', *ELH*, 76 (2009): p. 197.

Viewed alongside Coleridge's contemporary reading, however, it is possible to discern something of a strategy behind the poem's oblique allusions. Before he left for Germany in September 1798, Coleridge had been growing increasingly interested in Lessing, whose 'profound erudition' he had first encountered in 1796 (15 years after the philosopher's death).[20] Lessing's writings were the first volumes Coleridge purchased on his arrival in Germany, and in Göttingen he began making detailed and substantial notes on the writer in preparation for a projected biography (which never materialised).[21] He was, as such, steeped in Lessing's thought whilst he was composing 'The Devil's Thoughts' and many of the epigrams in his notebooks in 1799, and he would continue to discuss his plans to write the biography well into the following year.[22]

This interest in Lessing clearly manifests itself in his writing. Lessing's collection of epigrams and his essay *Zerstreute Anmerkungen über das Epigramm*, published in 1771, provided the basis for many epigrams adapted by Coleridge (with varying degrees of fidelity) whilst in Germany.[23] In *Zerstreute Anmerkungen*, Lessing sets out his view of the qualities that make a successful epigram, dissecting good and bad examples to support his case. His crucial argument is encapsulated in a description of the difference between the epigrams produced by

> a man of the world and a pedant; the first of whom talks of matters of experience, which lead to certain general truths, while the latter expatiates in sentences to which individual cases are yet to be applied.[24]

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[20] *CL*, i. p. 197. Sydney Kenwood, 'Lessing in England. II. The Influence of Lessing in England', *The Modern Language Review*, 9 (1914): p. 349.

[21] Maximiliaan Van Woudenberg, *Coleridge and Cosmopolitan Intellectualism 1794-1804: The Legacy of Göttingen University* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 148.

[22] *CL*, i. p. 632.

[23] See for instance *Poems*, ii. p. 577-89; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*, eds. Karl Lachmann and Franz Muncker (Stuttgart, Leipzig, Berlin: G. J. Göschen'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1886-1924).

[24] Original text: 'einem feinen Weltmanne und einem ſteifen Pedanten zugleich in Geſellſchaft findet: wenn jener Erfahrungen ſpricht, die auf allgemeine Wahrheiten leiten; ſo ſpricht dieſer Sentenzen, zu denen die Erfahrungen in dieſer Welt wohl gar noch erſt ſollen gemacht werden'; 'Ich werde es unfehlbar, und habe immer dieſes für die einzige Urſache gehalten, weil eine ſo große Menge bloß allgemeiner Begriffe, die unter ſich keine Verbindung haben, in ſo kurzer Zeit auf eine ander folgen: die Einbildung möchte jeden gern, in eben der Geſchwindigkeit, in ein

This central binary distinction lies behind many of the assessments Lessing makes of individual epigrammatists throughout the essay.

Among these he singles out for particular criticism the work of the sixteenth-century Welsh poet John Owen, ‘in whom the pedant, who lashes himself into wit, is heard more frequently than the man of experience’, and whose epigrams as a result represent ‘so many general conceptions [succeeding] one another without pause’.[25] Though Lessing does not quote an example, his point may be demonstrated with Owen’s epigram ‘Of Hereticks’:

> *Virgil* from *Enn’us* dross did Gold extract:
> But Hereticks from Gold do dross compact.[26]

Whilst there is a witty inversion of the first line in the second, the moral is a general and unremarkable one: the target is sweepingly simplistic and unspecific (no particular heretic or instance of heresy being alluded to), and the metaphorical references to ‘Gold’ and ‘dross’ are somewhat vague in their application. To Lessing even the wit of such pieces appears strained. He feels that, rather than allowing it to arise naturally from reflection on experience, Owen ‘lashes’ himself into it (visible perhaps in the slightly forced association between the otherwise-unrelated heretics and Virgil). In Lessing’s view these qualities render his epigrams so contrived and general that he finds he cannot ‘read a whole volume of Mr. Owen at one time, without growing giddy’.[27]

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individuelles Bild verwandeln, und erliegt endlich unter der vergebnen Bemühung’. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften* (Berlin: Chriſtian Friedrich Voß, 1771), p. 114. Translation from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams; with Essays on Fable and Epigram* (London: John and H. L. Hunt, 1825), p. 176.

[25] Original text: ‘bei dieſem der Pedant ſich unzählig öfters hören läßt, als der feine Mann von Erfahrung; und daß der Pedant mit aller Gewalt noch oben drein witzig ſeyn will’. Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, pp. 114-15. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 176.

[26] John Owen, *John Owen’s Latine Epigrams, Englished by Tho. Harvey, Gent* (London: Robert White, 1677), p. 56.

[27] Original text: ‘Ich halte den, in allem Ernſte, für einen ſtarken Kopf, der ein ganzes Buch des Owens in einem Zuge leſen kann, ohne drehend und ſchwindlicht zu werden’. Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 115. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 176.

At the opposite end of the spectrum Lessing cites the example of Martial. Unlike Owen, unsubstantiated 'moraliz[ing] forms no part of the object of Martial, although most of his subjects are moral ones'. Instead, Martial's 'moral', Lessing asserts, 'is entirely interwoven with his subject, and he moralizes more by examples than by words'.[28] Rather than contriving a scenario to illustrate a proposition, Martial first grounds his epigrams in personal experiences, from which general truths may then be intuitively deduced. To illustrate his point Lessing gives the example of an epigram by Martial on 'the history of Mucius Scævola' (a mythical Roman warrior who thrust his hand into a fire after unsuccessfully attempting to assassinate the Etruscan king Porsena):

> The right hand which, aimed at the king, was cheated by an attendant, laid itself, doomed to perish, upon the sacred hearth. But a prodigy so cruel the kindly foe could not brook, and he bade the warrior go rescued from the flame. The hand which, scorning the fire, Mucius, endured to burn, Porsena could not endure to behold. Greater, because it was cheated, is the fame and glory of that right hand; had it not erred, it had achieved less.[29]

Where the opening line of Owen's 'Of Hereticks' seems invented simply to provide a witty counterpoint to the concluding moral, this epigram places all the emphasis on the establishing scene. Rather than contriving to abstract a general moral, the final reflective statement makes a more specific comment on the narrative itself, prompting readers to draw their own 'inference [from] the individual case', as Lessing puts it.[30] In this way Martial 'puts us more on the alert' to discover the broader application of his epigrams, which, in the Mucius Scævola case (as Lessing reads it), is that 'a lucky failure will often effect the attainment of our purpose sooner than the best concerted plan'.[31]

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[28] Original text: 'Hingegen iſt das Moraliſiren gerade zu, des Martials Sache gar nicht. Obſchon die meiſten ſeiner Gegenſtände ſittliche Gegenſtände ſind [...]. [S]eine Moral iſt ganz in Handlung verwebt, und er moraliſiret mehr durch Bey ſpiele, als durch Worte'. Lessing *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 115-16. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 176-77.

[29] Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, pp. 179-80; Martial, *Epigrams*, trans. Walter C. A. Ker, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1919), i. p. 43.
Original text:

Dum peteret regem decepta satellite dextra,
Injecit sacris se peritura focis
Sed tam sæva pius miracula non tulit hostis,
Et raptum flammis jussit abire virum.
Urere quam potuit contempto Mucius igne.
Major deceptae fama est, et gloria dextræ;
Sinon errasset fecerat, illaminus.
Hanc spectare manum Porsenna non potuit.

[30] Full original text: 'das Vergnügen über eine ſo feine Betrachtung, daß oft der Irrthum uns geſchwinder und ſichrer unſere Abſicht erreichen hilft, als der wohlüberlegte, kühnſte Anſchlag, verbunden mit dem Vergnügen, welches der

Coleridge draws directly on *Zerstreute Anmerkungen über das Epigramm* in 'The Lethargist and the Madman'. Composed in the weeks before its publication in the *Morning Post* on 19 September 1799, the piece is based upon a Greek epigram transcribed and discussed by Lessing in his essay.[32] Like the source text, Coleridge's poem details an account of 'two Patients', one in a 'lethargic trance', the other 'madder than MAD BESS'. In a fit of madness, the latter beats the former awake, but in the process fatigues himself and falls asleep, so that in the end 'Each prov'd the other's best physician'.[33] Coleridge's poem differs from the original, however, in its supplemented contextualisation. Where the Greek epigram provides no further characterisation of the two protagonists, Coleridge adds references that give the poem a political edge. The madman thus becomes 'Obstreperously jacobinical' and is compared to the 'folks in France', whilst the lethargist, we are told, is 'Like John Bull'.[34] From a self-contained anecdote it is in this way turned into a satirical comment upon the resumed conflict with France and the earlier 'Insensibility of the Public Temper', on which Coleridge had reported in 1798.[35]

This alteration may be read as a correction of the faults Lessing had found in the original epigram, namely that it 'conveys nothing valuable', and is 'humorous, but nothing more'.[36] For Lessing, the protagonists simply exchange fates: it is not clear what the consequences of the transaction will be, or how any useful lesson might be derived. By suggesting a broader political application, Coleridge initially seems to be pointing the way towards such a lesson. Certainly this is the interpretation proposed by Carl

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ein zelne Fall gewähret, macht das geſammte Vergnügen des Sinngedichts'. Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 122. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 180.

[31] Original text 'ſo ſetzt uns doch die bloße Anrede geſchwinder in Bewegung'. Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 117. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 177.

[32] *Poems*, ii. 585.

[33] *Poems*, ii. 585-87.

[34] *Poems*, ii. 586-87.

[35] *EOT*, i. p. 20.

[36] Original text: 'ich nirgends in meinem Nutzen verwenden zu können ſehe'; 'Das Ding iſt ſchnurrig genug. Aber was denn nun weiter?'. Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 123. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 181.

Woodring (one of the only critics to discuss the poem in any detail), though he is uncertain of the implications of the added connotations. Whilst from one point of view Coleridge appears to be justifying the necessity of war by emphasising the madness of the Jacobin (who irrationally 'froth'd and foam'd and roar'd'), such a reading is not consistent with what Woodring calls the 'ambiguous and disloyal' 'Moral' with which the poem concludes:

> The Allies and the French * * *
> Ye Fable-mongers in verse or prose;
> By all your hopes of Cash or Laurel,
> Save, O save us from the Moral.[37]

This quatrain appears to abandon any effort to attach a wider significance to the specific instance described, and indeed Woodring does not quite know what to make of it, simply describing it as a 'frustrating ambiguity'.[38] Rather than extrapolating a lesson, Coleridge appears merely to grow exasperated with the poem, discouraging any attempt to discern a deeper truth within it.

Viewed in the context of Lessing's thesis in *Zerstreute Anmerkungen*, however, this frustrating, and indeed frustrated, conclusion begins to appear more calculated. Lessing, as has been discussed, had poured scorn on what he felt to be overly moralising verse. His criticisms of John Owen in particular centre upon the contrived association of sweeping general truths with essentially unrelated (or at least only artificially and wittily related) establishing examples. Coleridge's concluding 'Moral' does much the same. It flags up the fact that, despite his superficial attempt to attach political connotations, the anecdote still in itself 'conveys nothing valuable'.[39]

Coleridge's original concluding lines, as they stand in his notebook, suggest the influence of Lessing still further. This version concludes not with the *Morning Post* poem's exasperated quatrain, but rather with its speaker (introduced at the outset as 'Dick') voicing a more coherent moral lesson:

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[37] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, 144; *Poems*, ii. 587.
[38] Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*, 144
[39] Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 181.

> So both were cur'd: & this example,
> Gives demonstration full & ample,
> That Chance may bring a thing to bear
> When Art sits down in flat Despair.[40]

Dick's unnamed listener (the narrator of the poem itself, who quotes Dick telling the tale), speaks the final lines in response to this lesson:

> That's true enough, Dick!—answer'd I—
> But as for th'example, tis a Lie![41]

The lines could be read in two ways. On the one hand, they may be seen to reflect the published version's 'Moral' by similarly pointing out the absence of an inherent moral truth within the anecdote itself, and thus highlighting the false connection between example and concluding interpretation. Read in this way, as a comment on the dishonesty of contriving such a conclusion, Coleridge makes the same Lessingian case by a different means. Where Lessing had praised Martial for 'moraliz[ing] more by examples than by words', Coleridge's speaker criticises Dick for moralising more by words than examples, deceptively using the former to disguise the unsuitability of the latter.[42]

On the other hand, the lines may also (and not mutually exclusively) be interpreted as a recommendation of genuine experience as the best source for epigrammatic writing. The example could be a 'lie' not only in the context of the concluding moral, but also in and of itself, as a story too neat to have the ring of truth. How long for instance would this pummelling have had to continue for the madman to fall asleep from sheer fatigue (and would this really constitute a cure for his madness)? Under either interpretation Coleridge's conclusion points to the epigram's inherent lack of truth, whether moral or experiential. Indeed, viewed alongside *Zerstreute Anmerkungen*, the line may well have been intended to imply an absence of both forms of truth simultaneously. For Lessing, an epigram's moral truth must be derived from experiential truth: the good epigrammatist 'talks of matters of experience, which lead to certain general truths', whilst the bad one adopts a 'pedant[ic]' obsession with neat comparisons between ungrounded 'general conceptions'.[43] In the two versions of 'The Lethargist and the Madman', then, Coleridge makes the same point, highlighting that the anecdote favours the pedantic neatness of a superficial counterpoint over the moral validity of genuine reflection on experience.

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[40] *CN*, i. 624.19.

[41] *CN*, i. 624.19.

[42] Original text: 'er moraliſiret mehr durch Beyſpiele, als durch Worte'. Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 116. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, pp. 176-77.

These parallels between *Zerstreute Anmerkungen* and 'The Lethargist and the Madman', once discerned, shed light on Coleridge's intentions in other contemporary works. What at first reads as obscurity and excessive self-referentiality in 'The Devil's Thoughts' thus comes to appear more like an attempt to avoid the mistakes made by Dick and John Owen. Where Owen, like Dick, appends generic truisms to contrived examples, Coleridge's epigrammatic stanzas, by contrast, draw pervasively on real personal experience in satirising their targets, to the point of revealing his own complicity in the same faults. Rather than extrapolating contrived morals and linking his stanzas with careful connections, Coleridge encourages reflection on these individual personal experiences by leaving them as they are (regardless of potential obscurity) and allowing them to speak for themselves, without contrived witty connections and explanations. The personal relevance of the exchange between the Devil and the bookseller, for example, like that of the reference to the 'lawyer killing a viper', is left wholly unexplained, with no concluding interpretation of its enigmatic significance. By presenting it in this way Coleridge 'puts us more on the alert' (to use Lessing's phrase), prompting readers to intuit the moral for themselves.[44]

Of course, this ambivalent self-referentiality is nothing new amongst Coleridge's satirical writing, which from as early as 1795 displays similar characteristics. Chapter One has shown how Coleridge drew on classical satire in his political prose, which is often as self-reflexive and 'glib [and] hypocritical' as

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[43] Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 176.

[44] This may well have been an approach Coleridge discussed with his co-author Southey, whose own later poetry includes criticisms of overly contrived and moralistic satire similar to Coleridge's in 'The Madman and the Lethargist': see for instance Robert Southey, *The Contributions of Robert Southey to the "Morning Post"*, ed. Kenneth Curry (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 175-76.

Jerome Kemp and Emily Gowers find Horace's *Satires* to be.[45] Consistently encouraging readerly attention and scrutiny, and coding real personal experiences and concerns into apparently public political writing, Coleridge had always leant more towards Martial than Owen (as Lessing presents them) in his own satire.

His fascination with Lessing, as such, may perhaps be more accurately described as a recognition of intellectual affinity. This is precisely the case Sydney Kenwood makes when he argues (whilst discussing the similarity between Lessing's and Coleridge's praise for Shakespeare) that it is 'reasonable to think that Coleridge was confirmed in opinions, already acquired from others or privately formed, by the authority of the German critic'.[46] It is perhaps this awareness of their intellectual similarity that lies behind Coleridge's increasing appreciation of their physical similarity. On first seeing a 'fine picture' of Lessing, Coleridge notes, with the detachment of reported speech, that the figure had 'eyes apparently not unlike mine' (the double negative highlighting a hint of scepticism).[47] Yet further into his German tour, as Maximiliaan Van Woudenberg observes, this 'personal identification', hitherto somewhat dispassionate, distinctly 'intensified'.[48] In a later letter to his wife the portrait is no longer described simply as 'fine', but rather 'very, very fine', whilst the eyes, no longer merely 'apparently' similar, are decidedly 'uncommonly like mine'.[49] Lessing appealed to Coleridge, one could argue, in part because he saw something of himself in him.

This is not to say that Lessing did not influence or affect Coleridge's writing. What he does seem to provide him with, at least as far as his satire is concerned, is a framework with which to approach ideas and tendencies that Coleridge had already developed. This framework, as the next section will illustrate further, crystallised and defined the instinctive attitudes towards satire that Coleridge had developed over the course of the 1790s.

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[45] Kemp, 'A Moral Purpose', p. 60; Horace, *Satires: Book 1*, ed. Emily Gowers, p. 171.

[46] Sydney H. Kenwood, 'Lessing in England. II. The Influence of Lessing in England', *The Modern Language Review*, 9 (1914): 349-50.

[47] *CN*, i. 337.

[48] Maximilliaan Van Woudenberg, *Coleridge and Cosmopolitan Intellectualism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p.148.

[49] *CL*, i. p. 437.

6.3

At the heart of Coleridge's increasingly clearly conceived approach to satire lies Lessing's formulation of the crucial distinction between 'Witz' (wit) and 'Genie' (genius). The distinction had been posited several decades before, in the early years of the eighteenth century, and Coleridge himself appears to refer to it on occasion well before his engagement with Lessing at the century's end. After studying Lessing, however, Coleridge's use of the terms becomes more considered and frequent, revealing an increasingly serious engagement with the implications of the distinction. This engagement is the key to understanding Lessing's influence on Coleridge's attitude to satire. Rather than altering his views on satirical writing and its dangers, Lessing spurred Coleridge to articulate and label for the first time the instinctive inclinations he had long been forming.

Lessing's conception of the distinction between wit and genius is articulated plainly in his 1769 collection of essays on theatre entitled *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. Outlining the criteria by which he judges plays and playwrights, Lessing centres upon the negative quality of wit, which, he argues, deals only with surface-level resemblances between ideas and events. One who exercises wit, therefore,

> is not concerned with events that are grounded in each other but rather only with what is similar or dissimilar [...]. The only thing a wit can do is join these together, weaving and tangling their threads so that from one moment to the next we lose one among the others and are toppled from one perplexity into another.[1]

The comment echoes the criticisms Lessing had made of epigrammatists like John Owen, who wittily 'lash' together unrelated notions so relentlessly that he cannot read a volume of his 'without growing giddy'.[2] In both cases, Lessing suggests that wit produces confusion. By associating ideas that ought not to be associated, it lacks a firm grounding in reality, instead dizzying the reader with its shifting frames of reference. The product, more often than not, is art that is merely ‘A toy for fashion’, mechanically reordering the clichéd preconceptions and frivolous tastes of the day.[3]

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[1] G. E. Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy*, trans. Wendy Arons and Sara Figal, ed. Natalya Baldyga (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 114.

[2] Lessing, *Vermiſchte Schriften*, p. 115. Translation from Lessing, *Fables and Epigrams*, p. 176.

Genius, by contrast, presents its subjects in their ‘natural’ light. It ‘concerns itself’, Lessing writes, ‘only with incidents that are grounded in each other, with chains of cause and effect’.[4] Whether in an epigram or in a play, genius requires the writer to grasp more deeply and intuitively the images they present, so that they may be placed in a just relation to one another, rather than forced together with contrived logic and fashionable rhetorical effects. This intuitively perceived compositional arrangement necessarily involves a rejection of established rules of literary composition, and an indulgence in a creative process ‘which allows the imagination free play’.[5] As Hugh Barr Nisbet puts it, Lessing conceives of an artist of genius as ‘one who creates spontaneously and intuitively, and who does not so much apply the existing rules of art as [...] require the existing rules to be modified’.[6] The result, for Stanley Corngold, is a ‘profound [...] symbolic discourse expressive of authentic convictions and feeling’, one which, though initially seeming to be irregular and unconventional, is nevertheless rooted in genuine experience of, and feeling for, what is being described.[7] By avoiding artificial connections and comparisons borrowed unthinkingly from others, writers of genius are able truthfully to communicate their thoughts and experiences, rather than merely impressing readers with their cleverness. This deeper dialogue between writer and reader is, for Lessing, the most perfect and creatively inspiring form of art: ‘a *genius*’, he writes, ‘can only be ignited by another *genius*, and most easily by one who seems to owe everything just to nature’.[8]

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[3] G. E. Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy*, p. 114.

[4] G. E. Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy*, p. 114.

[5] See Jane Kneller, ‘Imaginative Freedom and the German Enlightenment’, in *Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), p. 184.

[6] Hugh Barr Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 396.

[7] Stanley Corngold, ‘Wit and Judgment in the Eighteenth Century: Lessing and Kant’, *MLN*, 102 (1987): p. 465; original text: ‘um die unnützen Schätze des Gedächtnisses in Nahrungen des Geistes zu verwandeln’.

[8] *Encyclopedia of German Literature*, ed. Matthias Konzett (Chicago and London: Fitzroy and Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 323.

Though Lessing's was a particularly influential formulation of the wit/genius distinction (as Corngold and Paul Böckmann detail), he was not the origin of the idea. Matthias Konzett argues that Lessing was indebted to earlier English writing on artistic creativity, and notably Edward Young's 1759 'Conjectures on Original Composition'.[9] Developing Joseph Addison's differentiation between shallow artificial 'Talent' and 'natural Genius' (a distinction Daniel Cook finds 'hazy' and indistinct), Young sets out a more specific definition.[10] What Addison refers to as 'Talent', Young calls 'Learning', which he defines as 'borrowed knowledge' that has been received and imitated (cleverly reworked or otherwise) from others.[11] 'Genius', meanwhile, employs 'knowledge innate, and quite our own', and is to be found in the 'sublime flights' and disordered but nevertheless 'profound penetrations' of writers like Shakespeare.[12] Young's essay was translated into German twice the following year, and its impact may be seen not only in Lessing's work but also in writing over the subsequent decades, notably by Immanuel Kant (whose thought on the subject would go on to influence Coleridge in subsequent years).[13]

Even before his engagement with Lessing at the end of the 1790s, Coleridge displays an awareness of this current of thought. As M. H. Abrams details in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, the notion of genius, as articulated by Young and his successors, had slowly pervaded English discourse over the course of the eighteenth century.[14] Coleridge's early use of the term, often in passing references (to Lamb being 'a man of uncommon Genius', for example), seems largely to be a product of this tacit cultural influence.[15] After encountering Lessing, however, his references become more systematic. As well as appealing in several places to a more definite conception of '*Inventive* Genius', Coleridge's correspondence also reveals a direct association between Lessing himself and this more distinct and frequent use of the term.[16] When preparing for his biography of Lessing in his notebook, for example, Coleridge describes his youthful plan to move from Leipzig to Berlin, there to publish a theatrical periodical. This plan, Coleridge writes, flew in the face of his 'Parents' anxiety' (they had intended Lessing for more sober scholarly pursuits), because it

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[9] *Encyclopedia of German Literature*, p. 323; Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (London: A. Millar and R. and J. Dodsley, 1759).

[10] *Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), v. pp. 25-28; see Daniel Cook, 'On Genius and Authorship: Addison to Hazlitt', *The Review of English Studies*, 64 (2012): p. 614.

[11] Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, pp. 35-36.

[12] Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, pp. 35-36.

[13] Joshua Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 54. For more on German responses to Lessing, see Corngold, 'Wit and Judgment in the Eighteenth Century'. For the influence of Kant's conception of genius on Coleridge's later thought, see Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796-1817: Coleridge's Responses to German Philosophy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 151-56.

[14] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 198-99.

[15] *CL*, i. p. 136.

> existed in the restlessness of natural Genius, which it calls desire to see the world, & to acquire new ideas.[17]

The inclusion of the term here, in a discussion of a thinker with whom it was so identified, is suggestive of the increased thought Coleridge was now paying to its meaning.

Where his praise for Lamb's 'uncommon Genius' had simply expressed a general sense of admiration for poetic ability, here the word is more closely associated with the qualities Lessing had attributed to it. Firstly, by connecting it with Lessing's desire to break away from his parents' influence, Coleridge paints his 'natural Genius' as an impulse to free himself from the dictates of others and from inherited ways of thinking (much as Lessing's own definition of genius emphasises genuine creative independence rather than a slavish attempt to please others on their terms). Secondly, Coleridge presents this spirit of genius as manifesting itself in an urge to experience the world, and to interact with and draw from this experience directly, rather than relying solely upon bookish learning and received wisdom. Thirdly, the reference to the restlessness of genius echoes Lessing's emphasis on playfulness, suggesting a wilful inclination to disobey established codes and to strive to see things for what they are. Unlike Coleridge's offhand references to genius in earlier years, such comments gesture towards an increased receptiveness to the import of the Lessingian theories he was reading at that time.

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[16] *CL*, i. p. 539.
[17] *CN*, i. 377.

This Lessingian conception of genius had an important effect on Coleridge's satire. Coleridge had always sought to challenge and subvert the established codes of current satirical writing, rewriting the rules for how fashionable tropes and motifs should be used. In the epigrammatic satires he produced whilst researching Lessing's thought, however, he seems to reveal a more conscious effort to embody the ideal qualities of 'natural Genius'. Not only do these pieces carefully and ubiquitously draw upon a range of intuitions from personal experience, but they do so in a way that explicitly challenges contrived poetic structures and forced examples (like that of Dick in 'The Madman and the Lethargist'). The serpent in 'The Devil's Thoughts' serves as the perfect symbol of this new clarity of purpose. As Coleridge wrote in his notebook, '[it appears] in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of Genius', restlessly meandering like the circuitous and playfully self-reflexive obscurities of his own rule-breaking satire. By implicitly comparing himself to a serpent in the poem, Coleridge betrays a new understanding of his work in the context of this ideal.

That Coleridge had developed a new consciousness of what had previously been a seemingly instinctive attitude to satire is perhaps most obvious from his 1807 notes on Junius. Largely steering clear of the still-fraught questions surrounding the notorious satirist's true identity, this brief commentary instead uses Junius as the basis for a wider discussion of the qualities that make good satire. Coleridge presents him as a model example of the sort of partisan satirical invective he had so criticised in earlier years, arguing that

> on [Junius'] character, and in the mould of [his] writings must every man cast himself, who would wish in factious times to be the important and long remembered agent of a faction.[18]

This language of moulds and casting is significant. Junius, Coleridge contends, is essentially a vessel for pre-formed ideas, rarely 'deviat[ing] into any originality of thought', although when he does 'he takes care that it shall be such as excites surprise for its acuteness, rather than admiration for its profundity'.[19] Frederick Burwick argues that such descriptions must be read as a form of praise, in which Coleridge lauds Junius's indulgence in 'forthright honesty rather than abstruse insight'.[20] Yet when viewed against his response to Lessing's conception of genius, a less flattering set of implications emerges.

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[18] S. T. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, 6 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 12. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980-2001), iii. p. 222. Hereafter cited as *Marginalia*.

Asserting that writers must cast or mould themselves in Junius' image, Coleridge echoes a prominent image from the first of his two projected essays on 'Pitt and Bonaparte' in 1800 (the second of which never appeared), written when his research into Lessing was still fresh in his mind. The essay presents Pitt as a perfect example of Lessing's definition of wit, possessing

> a premature and unnatural dexterity in the combination of words, which must of necessity have diverted his attention from present objects, obscured his impressions, and deadened his genuine feelings.[21]

This clever 'management of words', Coleridge continues, 'though it destroys genius, will often create and always foster, talent'.[22] Asserting the essentially witty nature of Pitt's mind, and its consequent lack of intuitive and creative genius, Coleridge brings the point home with one of the best-known images of the essay:

> His father's rank, fame, political connexions, and parental ambition, were his mould: he was cast, rather than grew.[23]

The image underscores the inherently unimaginative nature of wit, and the fact that, because Pitt lacks true natural genius, he is unable to break free of the strictures placed upon him by circumstance.

By using the same image to describe Junius, Coleridge associates his satire with the same uninventive wittiness. Rather than breaking the mould in which he has been cast in order to make something genuinely challenging and new, Junius, like Pitt, simply falls back on the factional preconceptions and prejudices he has unthinkingly absorbed from the environment around him. Though he might recombine these according to what Coleridge calls (in the notes on Junius) a ‘witty logic, [or] an association of thoughts by amusing semblances of cause and effect’, his writing will never truly speak to any reader who is not already of his own faction: his satirical attacks are fundamentally designed, Coleridge argues, to ‘impel to action, not thought’.[24] This, according to Lessing, is precisely the reverse of how genius functions. For Raimonda Modiano, Lessing’s assertions that ‘a *genius* can only be ignited by another *genius*’ amount to a single critical fact at the heart of his theory, namely that ‘the only thing [one] genius can impart to another is the injunction of originality’.[25] Works of true genius, unlike those of Junius, encourage readers to think creatively for themselves.

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[19] *Marginalia*, iii. p. 222.
[20] Frederick Burwick, *A History of Romantic Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), p. 109.
[21] *EOT*, i. p. 219.
[22] *EOT*, i. p. 219.
[23] *EOT*, i. p. 219.

Putting this criticism into words in the notes on Junius, Coleridge succinctly articulates for the first time a principle that had lain beneath his satire throughout the 1790s. Though he had occasionally lost the thread of it, from time to time indulging in what seem to be thoughtlessly provocative attacks, his satirical writing for the most part issues unmistakeable injunctions to think independently and sympathetically. Undermining the unthinkingly vitriolic factional motifs of all satirists, particularly those who were closer to his own side of the argument (like John Thelwall), and who should know better, Coleridge challenges his reader to engage with his work, to avoid absorbing his arguments unquestioningly, and to make their own meaning from it. The result is satire that, as he puts it in the notes on Junius, fundamentally serves to promote the ‘legitimate investigation of truth’.[26]

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[24] *Marginalia*, iii. p. 222.

[25] Raimonda Modiano, ‘Coleridge as Literary Critic: *Biographia Literaria* and *Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism*’, in The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 225.

[26] *Marginalia*, iii. p. 222.

Conclusion

Despite some changes in tone and intended audience, Coleridge's satire, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, remains remarkably consistent. After 1800, however, there is something of a shift, one that may be effectively understood in the broader context of Coleridge's literary, rather than purely satirical, development. The increasingly clearly conceived notion of artistic genius that he developed at the end of the 1790s (which, as this conclusion discusses, lay beneath more than just his satire) gave way to growing concerns that his own writing may not, despite his best efforts, truly possess this quality. Whether as a result of his troubled relationship with Wordsworth, or of his natural tendency towards self-doubt, Coleridge grew increasingly despondent about the impact his work was having on its readers. Many critics have discussed the impact of this crisis on his writing more generally, but its effect upon his satire remains largely to be explored. Forming a natural bookend to the development of his attitude to satire in the 1790s, the year 1800 marks a noticeable shift and a useful starting point for future study.

Chapter Three discussed how Coleridge's epigram addressed '*TO MR. PYE*', originally published in the *Morning Post* on 24 January 1800, was presented in *Biographia Literaria* as a reflection on 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Although strictly speaking incorrect, such an application is certainly appropriate to the epigram's interest in poetic obscurity:

> Your Poem must *eternal* be,
> Dear Sir!—It cannot fail:
> For tis incomprehensible
> And without head or tail.[1]

Viewed alongside Coleridge's predilection for playacting the part of his own critics (evident in the Higginbottom sonnets for instance), his misattribution of the epigram may from one perspective be read simply as another attempt subversively to appropriate this role.

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[1] *Poems*, ii. p. 584-85.

John Beer, however, proposes another interpretation. The reason Coleridge mistakenly remembered that the epigram was about the 'Ancient Mariner', Beer suggests, 'was because he knew at another depth of his mind that it was'.[2] Singling out apparent flaws and incongruities (for instance the fact that the mariner is 'restored to the country from which he set out', yet inexplicably 'see[s] it as if for the first time'), Beer argues that it is in fact the incomprehensibly 'strange logic' of this poem that Coleridge really addresses in his epigram, though he nominally addressed it to another poet at the time. Such an interpretation coheres with Coleridge's earlier comments about incomprehensibility. In both the 'Eolian Harp' and his correspondence from 1796, Coleridge proposes that '*Incomprehensibility* is as necessary an attribute of the First Cause, as Love, or Power, or Intelligence'.[3] This incomprehensibility, though it might defy human understanding, can nevertheless be sensed on a deeper level, 'with Faith that inly *feels*' (as he put it in the 'Eolian Harp').[4] The same, Beer argues, is true of the 'Ancient Mariner':

> however incomprehensible it might seem, once one began asking questions of it, [Coleridge believed] it would remain secure in the wholeness of its appeal to the three qualities he valued most: light and energy and love. In that respect its tail would always be firmly disappearing into its mouth, giving it unity.[5]

Though Beer does not mention Coleridge's broader use of the serpent as a symbol of creative genius, the parallel with his image of the self-digesting snake makes perfect sense. By deliberately subverting poetic and narrative conventions, and creating a poem that defies easy interpretation, Coleridge hopes to awaken a deeper spiritual intuition in his readers, igniting their genius (to put it in Lessingian language) by introducing them to his own.

With satire, the incentive to encourage this deeper engagement was much stronger. The poetic conventions that Coleridge subverts in pieces like the 'Ancient Mariner' were as nothing compared to the actively harmful and thoughtlessly prejudiced malice he found in satire. From as early as 1795, as Chapter

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[2] John Beer, 'Romantic Apocalypses', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 32 (2001): p. 115.
[3] *CL*, i. p. 193.
[4] S. T. Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), p. 99.
[5] Beer, 'Romantic Apocalypses', p. 116.

One has detailed, Coleridge's comments about satire align him with an eighteenth-century tradition of scepticism towards its inherent vengefulness. Like Hartley, he felt that satirists were swept into easy prejudice because of a failure to stop and actively sympathise with their subjects, resulting in impious malevolence that '*worketh not the righteousness of God'* (as Hartley puts it).[6] Confronting and subverting the detrimental satirical tropes and techniques he encountered, Coleridge created satires that, by the standards of the day, were 'without head or tail', seeking instead to prompt independent reflection from their readers.

By 1800, however, he was beginning to feel that such reflection was not forthcoming. Rather than 'inly *feel*[*ing*]' his genius, reviewers had instead merely criticised and unthinkingly condemned the incomprehensibility of works like the 'Ancient Mariner'. A 1799 review in the *British Critic*, for instance, pointed out the 'confusion of images, which loses all effect, from not being quite intelligible'.[7] Another in the *Monthly Review* described it as 'a rhapsody of wildness and incoherence' and famously 'the strangest story of a cock and bull that we ever saw on paper'.[8] Even Wordsworth, in a note appended to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, had stated that 'The Poem of my Friend has indeed great defects', among which was the fact that 'the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other'.[9] If his work did possess wholeness of a deeper kind, this was clearly not being perceived by a significant proportion of Coleridge's early readers.

By 1800, these criticisms were beginning to be reflected in Coleridge's own doubts about his ability to write poems that were capable of speaking to his audience's inner genius. This self-doubt was often framed in comparisons with Wordsworth. 'If I die', Coleridge told Godwin in March, the obituaries will say that 'by shewing to him what true Poetry was, [Wordsworth] made him know, that he himself was no Poet'.[10] Read in this light, Beer's interpretation of the reflexive commentary in '*TO MR. PYE*' takes on a new quality, becoming a mournful embodiment of his failure to inspire readers even to attempt to make 'head or tail' of his writing. As Beer himself puts it, Coleridge is forced to accept 'that his early readers showed no signs of making [the] connections' required to engage with his work fully.[11]

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[6] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, ii. pp. 288-89.

[7] *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage, Volume 1: 1794-1834*, pp. 57-58.

[8] *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage, Volume 1: 1794-1834*, pp. 56.

[9] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems. In Two Volumes* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), i. p. 214.

This realisation had significant ramifications for Coleridge's satire, which had relied on promoting active interpretation and the formation of new connections. His long verse satire 'Talleyrand to Lord Grenville', published in the *Morning Post* on 7 January 1800, reflects this growing despondency. Signing himself 'Gnome' (and likening himself in the introduction to the dwarves in romances who 'always ran before to proclaim the advent or arrival of a knight or giant'), Coleridge echoes numerous self-deprecating comparisons he had elsewhere drawn—for instance in his correspondence with Cottle—between 'The Giant Wordsworth' and his own diminutive poetic stature.[12] Though written for a public context, 'Talleyrand to Lord Grenville' thus immediately establishes itself in the context of Coleridge's private despondency.

The poem's mockery of Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, Napoleon's Minister of Foreign Affairs (whose recent overtures of peace had been rejected by the British government), also reflects the doubts Coleridge was contemporarily feeling about his own poetic genius. Talleyrand, the speaker of the poem, is exaggeratedly prolix and circumlocutory, moving from point to point with little semblance of an overarching argument. In a key passage, he explicitly highlights and defends this style (which he claims to share with Grenville), asking

> what charms can be shew'd
> In a thing that goes straight like an old Roman road.
> The tortoise crawls straight, the hare doubles about,
> And the true line of beauty still winds in and out.
> It argues my Lord! of fine thoughts such a brood in us,
> To split and divide into heads multitudinous [...].

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[10] *CL*, ii p. 714.
[11] Beer, 'Romantic Apocalypses', p. 116.
[12] *Poems*, ii. p. 630; *CL*, i. p. 391. Another sarcastic implication of his own diminutive stature may be found at *CL*, ii. p. 826.

Were a genius of rank, like a common place dunce,
Compell'd to drive on to the main point at once,
What a plentiful vintage of initiations
Would Noble Lords lose in your Lordship's orations.[13]

The passage amounts to a direct refutation of the Lessingian principles under which Coleridge himself had been operating. 'Genius' here is not a divinely communicative force that transcends the unimaginative and overly rigid confines of genre and convention; it is simply a label that disguises Talleyrand's arrogant and incorrect assumption of a natural ability to communicate with his audience. As if to controvert his claims to genius directly, the reader finds that very little of note has actually been expressed by the end of the poem, with Talleyrand closing merely by stating that he will 'pause, and resume the remainder to-morrow'.[14] Just as Coleridge promised and failed to deliver the second essay of the 'Pitt and Bonaparte' series (much like the projected biography of Lessing and the conclusion of 'Christabel'), the second part of the poem never appeared. Talleyrand claims to possess genius, but like Coleridge himself (in his own self-deprecating estimation) he fails in the end to communicate anything of real value to his audience.

The despondency of this period did pass, but it nevertheless marks a fundamental change in Coleridge's satirical output. Though he continued to write satirical pieces after 1800, they grew shorter and more infrequent, and were for the most part not intended for newspaper readerships. A handful of humorous and self-mocking verses, like 'To Mr. Amphlett', 'Epitaph on Poor Col, by Himself', and 'On Tom Poole's Meanderings', were drafted in his notebooks over the subsequent years, and were generally addressed to friends and personal acquaintances.[15] The notable absence of the kind of public political satire he had produced over the course of the 1790s (which he had spontaneously written even when not employed by newspapers) reflects a broader change in the way Coleridge thought of, and sought to relate to, his audiences. Lucy Newlyn has argued that Coleridge grew ever more disillusioned with a 'reading public [that] seemed anonymous, hostile and overpowering', seeking instead, as John-David Lopez puts it, 'a symbiotic, sympathetic, easy community based on intimate exchange'.[16] This instinct was of course not wholly a new one for Coleridge. He had attempted to create such a community as early as 1796 in *The Watchman*, but, as Chapter Two has discussed, that project failed principally because its readership ended up being too broad (with Coleridge of necessity either offending or neglecting one or other of the groups within it). After becoming increasingly disillusioned, in the years around 1800, with the intellectual alertness of the wider newspaper-reading public, and with his own ability to elicit this alertness from such an audience, Coleridge begins more consistently to seek a friendly and accepting community of readers for his satire.

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[13] *Poems*, ii. p. 632-33.
[14] *Poems*, ii. p. 636.
[15] *Poems*, ii. pp. 855, 755, 833.

Like the brief satirical verses he penned for friends, the instances of satirical material that he published over the following years tend as a result to be framed more as intimate exchanges than public political satire. In the aptly named *Friend*, for instance, the mocking commentaries on German society in Satyrane's letters (which are, as Coleridge puts it, intended only as 'light satire') are presented as extracts from a personal correspondence.[17] Though they often ridicule specific individuals (as in the account of the landlord of the hotel 'DIE WILDE MAN', who is compared to the representation of this name on the sign outside), the epistolary context in which this mockery appears places the reader in the shoes of the 'gentle' and accepting reader to whom it is addressed.[18] In much the same way, the satirical elements of *Biographia Literaria* (in which Satyrane's letters were also published) are first prefixed by friendly appeals to the readers' sympathy, and even caution. The Nehemiah Higginbottom sonnets, which are reprinted within its pages, are thus spoken of solely as a means by which the reader may get to know their author better, with Coleridge expressing hopes that his audience 'will I trust regard them as reprinted for biographical purposes alone'.[19] This shift towards presenting satire in a more private and intimate, even confidential, manner reflects the resolution he had reached two years earlier in the 1807 notes on Junius, which pointedly turn away from the factional satirical material he associates with Junius (and which is best suited, as Coleridge puts it, 'to be read aloud at a public meeting').[20] Rather than seeking to appeal to and ignite the genius of a more general readership, as he had done in his previous satirical writing, Coleridge increasingly addresses his satire to friendly readers who are ready to accept and engage sympathetically with his work.

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[16] Lucy Newlyn, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 6; John-David Lopez, 'Coleridge's Publisher and Patron: Cottle and Poole', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 61.

[17] S. T. Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series 75, 4. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), ii. p. 187. Hereafter cited as *TF*.

[18] *TF*, ii. pp. 213, 209.

As well as changing the framing of his satirical material, Coleridge also begins to alter its content. Throughout the 1790s, as this thesis has demonstrated, he had ubiquitously appropriated and subverted the motifs and concerns of contemporary political satire. 'I scorn to be of a faction', Coleridge stresses in *The Watchman*, seeking instead to challenge factional prejudice by undermining its language from within.[21] In the years after 1800, however, Coleridge's satirical focus turns away from politics and the previous aims of his satire. J. C. C. Mays notices as much when he states that, as Coleridge grows older, his 'satire becomes more social than political'.[22] Satyrane's letters, like the satirical elements of *Biographia Literaria* and short pieces like 'To Mr Amphlett', all take explicitly personal and private experience for their subject matter, rarely diverting into politics or looking back to the forms of political satire Coleridge had earlier challenged.

Even the few instances of ostensibly political satire Coleridge published in newspapers after the 1790s do not display the same interests and concerns as his earlier works. One such piece is 'A Philosophical Apology for the Ladies', a 15-stanza satirical ode 'Addressed to Lord Kenyon' and published in the *Morning Post* in 1801. Mays has questioned Erdman's attribution of the poem to Coleridge, and indeed it does read very differently to the poems of the preceding decade. Though it is ostensibly a purely political poem, intended to mock Sir Lloyd Kenyon (the Lord Chief Justice), both Heidi Thomson and Anya Taylor have supported Erdman's claim with reference to the consonance between the subject matter and Coleridge's private contemporary concerns. Directly addressing Kenyon (who had recently voiced a severe stance on adultery), the ode satirises the societal prudishness he represents, urging him to 'let Minerva's lyre / [...] sooth [*sic*] thy ire', so that he may recognise the distance between his unnaturally strict morality and the wantonness of nature, where

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[19] *BL*, i. p. 27.
[20] *Marginalia*, iii. p. 222.
[21] *TW*, p. 14.
[22] Mays, *Coleridge's Experimental Poetics*, p. 174.

> Each fragrant plant, and blooming flow'r
> In am'rous bliss enjoy the hour.[23]

Infatuated with Sara Hutchinson despite being married, or as Taylor puts it, 'loving one woman and impregnating another', Coleridge was certainly in a position to question the marital rigidity advocated by Kenyon.[24] Thomson, developing this argument, points out that Coleridge also 'shared [a] botanical interest with Sara Hutchinson at this time', one 'inspired by Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants*'.[25] Thus although the attribution cannot be definitively verified, it nevertheless 'stages', as Thomson puts it, 'his main preoccupations at the time'.[26] Despite selecting an ostensibly political target, the poem's real preoccupation as such is not politics (to which it makes almost no reference), but a private lament regarding the social mores Coleridge felt were constraining him personally.

This movement away from challenging the political prejudice of factional readerships in his satire completes a shift that had started with the epigrams. Although pieces like 'The Lethargist and the Madman' were still confronting the failings of contemporary factional satire as late as 1799, Coleridge had already begun to use satire to reflect more privately on his personal concerns in the many epigrams he had drafted in his notebooks earlier that year. His 'Epigram on a Reader of his Own Verses', for instance, like the ‘Epigram on a Supposed Son’ (both discussed in Chapter Six), is at heart a reflection upon his own woes and mistakes, rather than an outward-facing attempt to change the minds of the public. The disillusionment of 1800 may as such be viewed more as a tipping point that had gradually been reached, rather than a sudden and complete reversal of opinion.

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[23] *EOT*, iii. p. 303.

[24] Anya Taylor, *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love and the Law Against Divorce* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 137

[25] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 180.

[26] Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper*, p. 180.

Yet despite this shift, the satires written after this point do not renounce the satirical instincts that he had developed over the 1790s. The increasingly dominant personal and social focus of his satire, for example, perfectly satisfies the Lessingian requirement for satirical writing to be grounded in real-world experience, rather than arbitrary wit. Similarly, Coleridge continues to display a strong Horatian impulse to highlight the unreliability of his own speaking voice, even as he satirises others. Satyrane’s attempts at ‘ridiculing’ the moral failings of others are introduced by a short preamble, written in Coleridge’s own voice, explaining that Satyrane’s friends

> used with mock solemnity to entreat a short reprieve from our prejudices from him, under the lofty title of “puissant and most redoubtable Idoloclastes”.[27]

The introduction associates Satyrane’s ‘ridiculing’ of others with this hint at his own self-conceit, prompting the reader to take the satire with a pinch of salt in much the same way that Coleridge had done in *The Watchman*. This satirical self-deflation echoes many such instances across his career. From the Punic Greek of ‘*Εστησε*’, or ‘*Es tee see*’, to the meandering and self-contradictory Shandean wit of his speaking voice in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge reveals a lasting instinct to subvert his own satirical subversion of others.[28]

All this points to a continued recognition of the basic objective behind his forays into satire. As Coleridge puts it in ‘A Philosophical Apology for the Ladies’, his satirical purpose was at its core to encourage the reader to ‘Let frolic truths your soul inspire’, and in so doing to stimulate what the poem terms their ‘ardent genius’.[29] In this sense, the later satires are in large part no different from the earlier. Though Coleridge moves away from challenging the corruptive prejudice of contemporary political satire, ceasing to subvert its well-worn tropes and motifs, his desire, developed in the 1790s, to promote active attention and sympathy amongst his audience persisted into his later writing. Though for much of that decade he had not understood it in such defined terms, the central, considered, and consistent objective of his satire was to engage his reader’s genius.

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[27] *TF*, ii. p. 186.

[28] *CL*, ii. p. 867; on the Shandean quality of *BL* see for instance Thomas Keymer, ‘The Subjective Turn’, in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 323.

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[29] *EOT*, iii. pp. 305, 302.

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