

From

The Coleridge Bulletin

The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge
New Series 23 (NS) Spring 2004

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<http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/Coleridge-Bulletin.htm>

“I lay too many Eggs”: Coleridge’s “Ostrich Carelessness” and the Problem of Publication ¹

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When we come to look at it, the story of Coleridge’s dealings with publishers, and of the struggles he had, both inner and outer, to get his work finished and out into the world, is revealing. It takes us to the heart of what has been described on the blurb of a recent edition of his poems as the myth of his “brilliant unfulfillment”.² No one contributed more to this myth than Coleridge himself, as can be seen from the Notebook entry I have used for my title. The passage was probably written in 1802, but Coleridge used it in *Biographia Literaria* and subsequently, as a metaphor for himself and his place in the literary arena:

I lay too many Eggs in the hot Sands of this Wilderness, the World! with Ostrich Carelessness & Ostrich Oblivion. The greater part, I trust, are trod underfoot, & smashed; but yet no small number crawl forth into Life, some to furnish Feathers for the Caps of others, & still more to plume the Shafts in the Quivers of my Enemies, of them that lie in wait against my Soul.³

Laying the eggs of the imagination for him is the easy bit; he identifies his tragic flaw as “ostrich carelessness”, that bird’s proverbial failure to look after the eggs it has laid. He laments his inability to bring plans to completion, to parent these ideas into the world; he recognises that they need guardianship to survive in a hostile environment. The story of his poetry publication that follows, covering the period from *Poems* (1797) to *Christabel* (1816),⁴ bears out how well, and how poetically, Coleridge diagnosed his own predicament.

Some five months after Coleridge moved from Bristol to Nether Stowey in December 1796, the second edition of his poems went to the press. It has a marked character of its own that is likely to owe something to his need to protect himself from a hostile world by enclosing himself within a safe haven of friends. No less than forty-three poems by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd are included in this new edition. Coleridge introduces each of them as his “friends” in his new preface and claims that this volume puts into print all the

¹ From a talk given at Kilve, 7 September 2003. I am most grateful to Shirley Watters and Peter Larkin the directors of the Kilve Study Weekends, and to all the Kilve participants over the years, whether speakers or listeners. Above all, my first Kilve talk is dedicated to the memory of Reggie Watters who showed us all how it should be done. My many other obligations over specific points will be acknowledged in the footnotes.

² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Selected Poems: Bloomsbury Poetry Classics*, ed. by Ian Hamilton (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

³ *Coleridge’s Notebooks: A Selection*, ed. by Seamus Perry (Oxford University Press, 2002), entry 202. See also CNB I 1248 + n.

⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: Robinsons & Bristol: Cottle, 1796). *Poems by S. T. Coleridge, second edition, to which are now added Poems by Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd* (Bristol: Cottle, and London: Robinsons, 1797). S.T. Coleridge, *Christabel: Kubla Khan, a vision; The Pains of Sleep* (London: Murray, 1816).

poetical works of the three of them “deemed worthy of preservation”(xix).⁵ Lamb and Lloyd both accordingly appear with Coleridge on the title page, above a spoof Latin motto penned by Coleridge himself under the joke name Groscollius. In English it reads: “Double is the bond which binds us—friendship, and a kindred taste in poetry. May neither death nor lapse of time dissolve it!” (trans. CPW I 1227). The book takes on the character of a literary love-in. The contents page includes Coleridge’s ‘Lines to C. Lloyd’, Lloyd’s rapturous ‘Lines to S. T. Coleridge’, and Lamb’s ‘Lines to Charles Lloyd’ (v-vi), at whose surprise appearance on his doorstep, Lamb writes, “a gleam of random joy/ Hath flush’d my unaccustom’d cheek” (239).

In addition to this, *Poems* (1797), starts with a verse dedication to his elder brother George, which enthusiastically enumerates the key members of his new Nether Stowey world: his friend and benefactor Tom Poole, and his wife and child. He then announces his vocation as a poet who hears “a divine and nightly-whispering VOICE” promising him “predestinated wreaths” (ix).

As a poet he still, at this stage, puts his apocalyptic heavy artillery in pride of place. His opening poem, after the dedication, is ‘Ode on the Departing Year’, a poem that he will soon describe as “a rant of turgid obscurity” (PW I 302) and the closing one is ‘Religious Musings’, his most ambitious work to date. But the extent of revisions to the latter since the 1796 edition, shows his growing unease, and he apologises for its faults in his new preface (xvii). Hidden away in the middle of this enormous sandwich are the few poems that are still now read for pleasure rather than study, such as ‘The Eolian Harp’ (96) (to use its more familiar later title) and ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ (100).

The budding community enshrined in the 1797 edition was of course immediately superseded, and the line of Coleridge’s poetical development was likewise knocked sideways; Lloyd, Poole and Lamb aren’t the names that first come to mind when we think of the Stowey period. Ironically, it was immediately after Coleridge delivered the final copy for this second edition to his publisher Joseph Cottle in Bristol in early June 1797 that he walked on to Racedown to visit William and Dorothy Wordsworth. With one impulsive and emblematic leap over a Dorset gate, one of our most famous literary friendships burst into glory. The *Annus Mirabilis* had begun.

It’s hard to imagine how Coleridge might have developed as a poet if his God Wordsworth hadn’t entered his life at this time. The 1797 edition shows his need to join forces with others; better surely to be joined to a God and risk flying too close to the sun, than to bob along safely amidst a coterie of less talented admirers. But even if this alliance with Wordsworth did stimulate some of his best work, it had a disastrous effect on his published output. The change can be tracked by two letters he wrote to Joseph Cottle. In February

⁵ Parentheses in the text during this section refer to pages from *Poems* (1797) unless otherwise noted.

1798 Coleridge was considering including ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ in the next edition of his *Poems* (CL I 387). A month later his publishing proposals to Cottle were intermingled with Wordsworth’s schemes, and he suggested that their recently completed dramas *Osorio* and *The Borderers* “be published in one volume”; the next edition of his own poems was to be delayed (CL I 400). This marks the start of the Wordsworth-Coleridge joint publication history that brought forth their anonymous *Lyrical Ballads*, which was published by Joseph Cottle in 1798.

Joseph Cottle was born in 1770, so he was only a couple of years older than Coleridge—for all that he characterised himself in his reminiscences as an indulgent uncle. There is no question that, like many others at this time, he felt great affection for Coleridge and admiration for his genius, and got involved far more deeply than any normal publisher would or should. This may have given Coleridge a false impression of how relationships with publishers were to be conducted and of what to expect from them. Dependent as he was on having supportive encouragement and admiration, he could quickly feel under pressure from the expectations of others. Without Cottle’s unique handling, *Lyrical Ballads* as we know it might never have appeared.

Alas, this publishing relationship was not to last. Joseph Cottle had always published their works jointly with London booksellers to spread the risk, and in 1800 he removed himself from the picture altogether, by selling his copyrights to the London publishers Longman and Rees.⁶ After that, he confined himself to bookselling and printing. The term for publisher then was bookseller and it was only towards the end of the eighteenth-century that the *profession* we now know as publisher emerged from the *trade* of bookseller. This is an important social nuance: around this time, publishers were upwardly mobile, aspiring to be gentlemen rather than tradesmen.

The next publisher in Coleridge’s poetical career was just such a man, Joseph Johnson. As Maria Edgeworth wrote of him: “His lib’ral spirit a *Profession* made,/ Of what with vulgar souls is vulgar Trade”.⁷ In September 1798, the same month that *Lyrical Ballads* was published, while passing through London on his way to Germany, Coleridge received another deceptive impression of how easy it was to charm a publisher. He bragged of this latest conquest to Sarah in a letter written from Germany:

In London [...I...] introduced myself to Johnson, the Bookseller, who received me civilly the first time, cordially the second, affectionately the third—& finally took leave of me with tears in his eyes.—He is a worthy Man. (CL I 420)

A worthy man indeed! Johnson gave Coleridge a draft for £30, to be

⁶ Henry Curwen, *A History of Booksellers, The Old and the New* (London: Chatto and Windus, [1873?]), p.90.

⁷ Gerald P. Tyson, *Joseph Johnson: A Liberal Publisher* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1979), p.1.

drawn on his arrival at Hamburg. Johnson's only immediate return for this was the volume entitled *Fears in Solitude*, which contained 'France, an Ode', 'Fears in Solitude' and 'Frost at Midnight',⁸ but Coleridge claimed that his £30 payment was "purely out of affection [...] & as part of anything I *might* do for him" (CL I 417). Note that useful emphasis on "*might*".

Joseph Johnson was now sixty years old; he had been a very successful and hard working publisher specialising in Unitarian and other radical works by writers such as Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin. In July 1798 he had been found guilty of selling a seditious pamphlet, and at the time Coleridge visited him he was on bail awaiting sentence. He was to get six months in jail. In addition to his radical stance, Johnson had a history of cultivating new authors and had commissioned translations of new works from Germany. He may have reckoned that Coleridge was worth cultivating not just as an author, but as a discoverer or translator of new German material.⁹

'France, an Ode' had been published previously in the *Morning Post*,¹⁰ but 'Frost at Midnight' and 'Fears in Solitude' were published here for the first time. This arrangement, as Jonathan Wordsworth has pointed out, skilfully grounds Coleridge's revised political stance on the spiritual and personal human values of 'Frost at Midnight'.¹¹ Given that other great poems written in the same year remained unpublished (see below), this little edition is an oddity. It's detrimental to his solo career by leaking some strong new material which could be accumulating towards a future edition of his poems. It also seems, at first sight, to be a small gesture of independence from Wordsworth.

If so, the gesture was a complicated one. Joseph Johnson was Wordsworth's publisher. Five years earlier, in 1793, Johnson had published Wordsworth's first poem, *An Evening Walk*, and Wordsworth as late as 1799 regarded Johnson as his publisher, and Cottle as someone with whom he had a temporary arrangement (Tyson 172). So Coleridge's Johnson move, rather than a move away from Wordsworth, may actually have been a claim to occupy the same space; a way of saying to Wordsworth: "I've given you *my* publisher Cottle—now I claim equal rights over *your* publisher Johnson. Or, at least, I could do if I wanted." Whatever the case, Coleridge seems to have had no further dealings with Johnson after this. In fact, this particular author-publisher relationship can be described as a perfect one-night-stand; from Coleridge's point of view, anyway: Joseph Johnson is not on record as regards how it was for him. Perhaps he had more important things on his mind: jail for instance.

⁸ 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: Johnson, 1798).

⁹ See Tyson pp. 140-1 and 199-200 on Johnson's interest in German literature; and *passim* for his *modus operandi*.

¹⁰ On 16 April 1798 under the title THE RECANTATION (CPW I 463).

¹¹ See introduction (no pagination) in, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Fears in Solitude 1798*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Repr. Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989).

II

Coleridge's departure for Germany is a good point to step back and review his publication history. We can single out eight major poems, written in the fifteen months between the copy deadline for *Poems* (1797) and his German trip, which could have formed part of a new third edition:

Putative Third Edition of Poems Written 1797–1798 <i>Shading indicates poems published by 1799</i>		
<i>Date Composed</i>		<i>Publication</i>
1797	This Lime-tree Bower	
1797	Rime of the Ancient Mariner	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i>
1798	Frost at Midnight	<i>Fears in Solitude</i>
1798	France, an Ode	<i>Fears in Solitude</i>
1798	Fears in Solitude	<i>Fears in Solitude</i>
1798	Christabel, Part 1	
1798	Kubla Khan	
1798	The Nightingale	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i>

Of these ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and ‘The Nightingale’ were published anonymously in *Lyrical Ballads*; three poems, as we have seen, were published by Johnson. That leaves just three: ‘This Lime-tree Bower my Prison’, ‘Kubla Khan’ and Part One of ‘Christabel’. ‘This Lime-tree Bower’ was snapped up by Southey for his *Annual Anthology*, a miscellaneous volume of poems by different authors, where it was published anonymously in 1800,¹² but ‘Christabel’ and ‘Kubla Khan’ were to remain unpublished until 1816. In terms of interest there is little to compare with the troubled history of ‘Christabel’, and this will be my main theme in what follows. ‘Kubla Khan’ is potentially as interesting, is certainly as important, but its history remains mysteriously hidden. There is no contemporary record of its being written, no agonising over completion or revision, no publication proposal. ‘Christabel’, on the other hand, gives us a story of epic dimensions: its non-completion, its non-publication, its imagined publication, and its eventual rather unhappy publication with help from Byron.

On his return from Germany in 1799, amongst all the financial pressures bearing down on him, Coleridge regarded the completion of ‘Christabel’ as important. When Robert Southey asked him if he could have the finished poem for his *Annual Anthology*, Coleridge fended him off, and the reasons he

¹² *Annual Anthology*, ed. by Robert Southey, 2 vols (Bristol: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799-1800), II, 140-4.

gave in a letter dated 10 November 1799 are very important:

In my last letter I said I would give you my reasons for thinking Christabel, *were* it finished & finished as spiritedly as it commences, yet still an improper opening Poem. My reason is—it cannot be expected to please all/ Those who dislike it will deem it extravagant Ravings, & go on thro’ the rest of the Collection with the feeling of Disgust—and it is not impossible that were it liked by any, it would still not harmonize with the *real-life* Poems that follow. (CL I 545)

He continued to fend off Southey; and in April 1800, after four weeks with the Wordsworths in Dove Cottage, he intended that ‘Christabel’ (when finished) should be part of the new material in a second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, whose printing and publication he went on to Bristol to arrange on Wordsworth’s behalf.¹³ The struggle to finish ‘Christabel’ continued through the summer. “Every line”, he wrote during September, “has been produced by me with labor-pangs” (CL I 623). Finally, on 4 October 1800, Coleridge called on the Wordsworths to read them his completed ‘Christabel’ Part Two. Dorothy’s sparse journal entries have been the subject of baffled scrutiny ever since. She provides the following information:

On 4th October 1800, after a first reading: “Exceedingly delighted with the 2nd part of Christabel”.

On 5th October “Coleridge read a 2nd time Christabel—we had increasing pleasure. A delicious morning.”

On 6th October: “A rainy day. Coleridge intending to go but did not get off. We walked after dinner to Rydale. After tea read The Pedlar. Determined not to print Christabel with the LB.”¹⁴

Mary Moorman, writing in the 1950’s, viewed this as a “unanimous decision”, but more recent scholars view it as a rejection of ‘Christabel’ by Wordsworth and speculate on his motivation: fratricidal rivalry argued by the prosecution, and need for independence by the defence.¹⁵ Wordsworth’s own explanation was that, the “Style of this poem was so discordant from my own that it could not be printed along with my poems with any propriety”.¹⁶

¹³ What was never stated, but is obviously crucial, is what length this finished ‘Christabel’ was expected to be. There might be room in *Lyrical Ballads* for, say, a 650 line ‘Christabel’, but not, surely, for a poem that was expected to reach 1400 lines.

¹⁴ *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Mary Moorman, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 43. Hereafter cited in text as DWJ.

¹⁵ See Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p.490. Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth a Life*, pbk. edn (Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 186-186. Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), pp. 282-6. The fratricidal theme is explored throughout Stephen M. Weissman, *His Brother’s Keeper: A Psychobiography of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Madison: International Universities Press, 1989); see pp. 173-179 for its relevance to ‘Christabel’.

¹⁶ Cit. Gill 187+n, from Wordsworth’s letter to Longman and Rees on 18 Dec 1800. Gill’s view is that this explanation originates with Wordsworth and was subsequently taken up by STC to justify W’s decision to exclude ‘Christabel’. I am putting forward a scenario that allows STC more participation in this decision. though even his letter to Southey in November 1799 could, of course, have been influenced by discussions with W.

Although this decision does undoubtedly mark the end of the joint *Lyrical Ballads* project, I would prefer to soften the crisis slightly. A decision had previously been made for the new *Lyrical Ballads* edition to be credited to Wordsworth, with additional poems by an unnamed friend. Coleridge, as we have seen, had previously written to Southey that ‘Christabel’ would “not harmonise with [...] *real-life* Poems” (CL I 545), and this is uncannily similar to Wordsworth’s stated reasons for its exclusion.

Given how well ‘Christabel’ was developing, and how optimistic Coleridge always was about the few days needed to finish anything he was working on, he may have liked the idea of publishing ‘Christabel’ on its own; this would serve his purpose much better than having it included as an anonymous contribution to Wordsworth’s collection of “*real-life*” poems. The idea, floated by Coleridge in a letter of 9 October, of publishing ‘Christabel’ jointly with Wordsworth’s long poem in progress, ‘The Pedlar’ (CL I 631-2), makes sense of Dorothy’s Journal, and seems like a transitional position where the recognition that ‘Christabel’ needed a better setting than *Lyrical Ballads* was still combined with the idea of joint publication.¹⁷

And so, within two months, he announced his intention to “have Christabel published by itself” (CL I 649). Unfortunately, he was also getting increasingly divorced from reality; this is a stage of his life where we can truly see the effects of opium. He had written on 9 October that ‘Christabel’ had reached 1300 lines (CL I 631) and in a letter two days later it had “swelled into a volume of 1400 lines” (CL I 634). There is no evidence that more lines were written than the 677 lines that were eventually published, but the history of this fantasy ‘Christabel’ is fascinating. We can get surprisingly concrete about it.

After a long bed-ridden period of illness, he wrote to Poole, in March 1801, that he would “take a week’s respite” from “extricat[ing] the Notions of Time, and Space” to “make the Christabel ready for the press [...] with two essays annexed to it, on the Praeternatural—and on Metre” (CL II 706-7). This was a customary way of beefing up a single poem into a full-length book. He accordingly sounded out Thomas Longman, his new publisher in succession to Cottle. Longman’s hard-nosed advice was to go upmarket: he told Coleridge that “scarcely any, but Books of expence sold well. Expensive Paper & Ornaments &c were never laid out in vain. For the chief Buyers of Books were the Wealthy who bought them for Furniture.” (CL II 711). Welcome to the real world, Mr Coleridge. But Coleridge too was doing his best to join in, asking William Godwin, a seasoned author, for advice: “What is a fair price—what might an Author of reputation fairly ask from a Bookseller for one Edition, of a 1000 Copies, of a five Shilling Book?” (CL II 715).

So Coleridge made his pitch to Longman, claiming that ‘Christabel’ was about the same length as Robert Bloomfield’s 1500 line poem *The Farmer’s Boy*

¹⁷ Gill characterises this transitional proposal as Wordsworth’s ‘sop to Coleridge’ (note p.456).

which was currently enjoying great success as a single poem publication in an elaborately illustrated edition.¹⁸ For format, Coleridge suggested using George Ellis' edition of *Fabliaux*, a collection of translated French mediaeval tales as a model. The title page of this book is reproduced in *Figure 1*.¹⁹

He proposed "little Drawings engraved or cut in wood" and claimed that "A friend of mine is now drawing for me under my own direction some head- and tail-pieces, representing the particular Scenes & Places, which are mentioned in the course of the Tale, all of which he takes on the spot—and they are from the wildest & most romantic parts of this County. [...] The title of the Poem is CHRISTABEL, a Legend, in five Books." (CL II 716). Wordsworth repeated this upbeat party line in a letter to Poole, announcing that "Christabel is to be printed at the *Bulmerian* Press, with Vignettes, &c &c I long to have the book in my hand it will be such a Beauty."²⁰ The title page of *Fabliaux* shows that it was indeed printed by W. Bulmer & Co., which makes it likely that Coleridge and Wordsworth had enthused over this book's illustrations together.

Its suitability as a template for 'Christabel' becomes most apparent when we look at the head-piece for 'Aucassin and Nicolette' shown in *Figure 2*. The

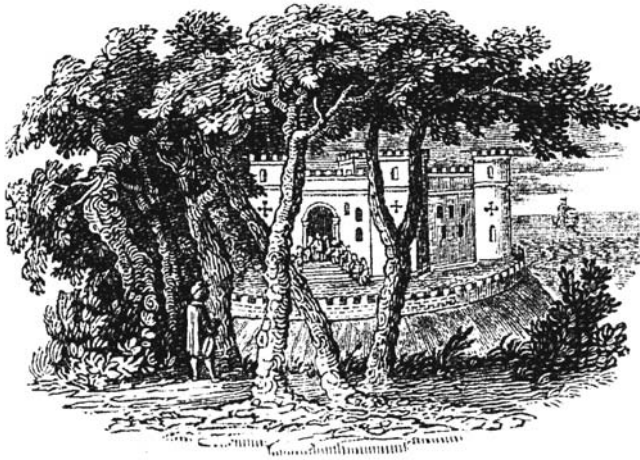


Figure 3: Model for proposed Longman *Christabel* of 1801 Headpiece (detail) from 'Aucassin and Nicolette' *Fabliaux* (1796)
By permission of the British Library, Shelfmark: 680.e.11

enlarged detail in *Figure 3* shows how well the castle at the head of this page could serve as the setting for 'Christabel'. The solitary figure holding a lute outside the circle of the castle walls seems to be standing by a "huge broad-breasted old Oak Tree"; is it fanciful to imagine Coleridge admiring this picture, and thinking of Bracy the Bard about "To

¹⁸ Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy: A Rural Poem in Four Books. With Ornaments engraved in Wood by Anderson* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1800) appeared in countless editions. See Bruce Graver, 'Illustrating *The Farmer's Boy*', *Romanticism* 9.2, 2003, 157-175, who brings out the importance of the illustrations to the poem's presentation and reception. Graver's analysis of the de-rustification of the illustrations in successive editions is useful contextual background to Coleridge's changes of direction over the presentation of 'Christabel' that I will discuss here.

¹⁹ M. Le Grand, *Fabliaux or Tales, abridged from French manuscripts of the XIIth and XIIIth centuries, selected and translated into English verse* [by G. L. W., i.e. G. L. Way]. *With a preface and notes* [by G. E., i.e. G. Ellis] (London: R. Faulder, 1796). Heading vignettes and tail pieces are by John and Thomas Bewick and pupils.

²⁰ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. by E. De Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.324.

FABLIAUX OR TALES,
ABRIDGED FROM FRENCH MANUSCRIPTS
OF THE
XIITH AND XIIITH CENTURIES

By M. LE GRAND,

SELECTED
AND TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE.

WITH
A PREFACE AND NOTES



LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. BULMER AND CO. SHAKSPEARE-PRESS.
SOLD BY R. FAULDER, NEW BOND-STREET.
1796.

Entered at Stationers' hall.



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE.

WHAT wight is he that fain would now be told
Of rare adventures fallen in days of old?—
Sweet verse I sing, and goodly deeds I tell,
Of a young pair that lov'd each other well :
Young were they both, in love their hearts were met, 5
Their names were Aucassin and Nicolette.
All that the youth assay'd, by day or night,
For his sweet maid, with skin like lily white,
And all his prowesses, and all his pains,
The fruitful compass of my tale contains. 10
So chaste, so cheerful, their love's strain doth flow,
No wight so sad but this must wake from wo ;
No wight, though stretch'd upon his bed he lie,
With pain distraught, or worn with malady,

clear yon Wood from Thing unblest”?

Alas Longman had been sold a dummy. The ‘Christabel’ “in five Books” was indeed “a Legend”. Three of these books only existed in Coleridge’s increasingly opium-fuelled imagination. He managed, in May 1801, a 22 line poem to his son, Hartley, which was metrically and idiomatically similar to ‘Christabel’ and he annexed this as the *Conclusion* to Part 2. It works surprisingly well. And that, as far as we know, was as far as he got with the writing of ‘Christabel’—but (and this is the paradox I want to stress) the fantasy—the unfinished ‘Christabel’ with which he was to tantalise his readers from 1801 onwards—was a masterpiece of the creative imagination.

III

To explain better what I mean by this, I would like to introduce another image used by Coleridge: the Sibyl (see *Figure 4*). This picture of the Sybil, which is taken from the title page of a seventeenth-century travel book by George Sandys that we know Coleridge read in 1802, shows her normal working methods.²¹ The Latin inscription from Virgil’s *Aeneid* (III 444) reads “she commits signs and symbols to leaves”. The three leaves laid out beside her in the picture will be blown away by the wind, to the frustration of those who have come to consult her. The Sibyl giveth and the wind taketh away. (Aeneas was accordingly advised to get her to speak out loud when he consulted her, to avoid this problem).



Figure 4: The Sibyl “commits signs and symbols to leaves”. Detail from the title page of George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey [etc.]* (1615).

By permission of the British Library, Shelfmark: W7734.OIOC

²¹ This book, George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey begun An: Dom: 1610. [etc.]*, 4th edn (London, 1637), is identified by Kathleen Coburn as the source for the ostrich egg metaphor quoted earlier (NB I 1248 + n). The ostrich features on p. 139 of that edition.

The earliest use by Coleridge of the *Sibylline Leaves* image I have traced is in 1809, when he refers to Wordsworth's "Sybill's [sic] Leaves blown about by the changeful winds of an anxious Author's Second-thoughts" (CL III 205). Even though this is nominally about Wordsworth, it is a characteristically fine self-portrait, an image that came to be used for the process of collecting and revising his own scattered poems.²² The Sibyl has a complicity in the dissipation or destruction of her own prophecies that matches Coleridge's wish, quoted earlier, for his eggs to be "trod underfoot, & smashed". In the case of the wind, we might allow that the Sibyl's is a passive act, but in one famous instance she is clearly discovered burning her own work.

In the early days of Rome she came to the palace of Tarquinius Priscus offering a nine volume set of her prophecies at a price that he felt was too high. When Tarquinius told her she must be mad to ask such a high price, she burned three volumes in front of him and demanded the same total price for the six that remained. The astounded Tarquinius again declined, so she burned three more in the same way and once more offered the last three remaining volumes at the same price originally asked for the complete set of nine. This time Tarquinius realised their true value and accepted. The books, called the *Sibylline Verses*, were preserved by the Romans with great care and were consulted in times of national emergency. This is a master-class in how to negotiate with a publisher; Tarquin has effectively bought six imaginary books at a price he refused to pay when they were in existence. As lost books they have exerted a greater pull on his imagination.²³

Although Coleridge was unable to pull off this feat on the financial plane, this is exactly what he has managed to do for posterity. 'Kubla Khan' owes part of its popular appeal to the story with which he frames it—he sells us this so-called fragmentary poem as a retrieved part of a lost vision, and we are asked to value it all the more for imagining what has been lost.²⁴ To return to the case of 'Christabel', Coleridge's insistence throughout that he had the full work in his mind in the wholeness of a vision, and just needed a bit of leisure, or was too indolent, to write it down is surely a similarly Sibylline tale where the "lost" parts add value to the "fragment" he claims to have saved for us.²⁵ I

²² The letter to Daniel Stuart containing this passage was written within five days of a letter STC sent to Longman which proposed gathering his *own* scattered poems for publication (CL III 202-5). The Sibyl image may have surfaced during this process.

²³ This story is a common entry in classical dictionaries such as *Lemprière's*. It appears around the 3rd Century A.D. in Christian Latin authors, such as Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, I 6, whose version I have retold here.

²⁴ I am indebted to Nicola Trott for pointing out that STC's "phantom-light" in 'Dejection: An Ode', is a related image: the slivered illumination of the new moon creates (or *implies*) "phantom-light" in the "dark" lunar disc, in the same way as the Sibyl's three offered books confer significance on the six books that are lost. This also matches the way Coleridge will illuminate only one single aspect of a complex symbol (such as the Sibyl)— his partial illumination invites us to explore the "phantom-light" of the full orb of its significance.

²⁵ STC may of course have believed in the completeness of this unwritten but perfectly envisioned 'Christabel', but Wordsworth's less sanguine view is persuasive: "schemes of this sort, passed rapidly and vividly through his mind, and so impressed him that he often fancied he had arranged things which really and upon trial proved to be mere embryos." (Cit TT I 577). The word of a close collaborator should be trusted.

would go so far as to claim that if any collection of Coleridge's merited the title *Sibylline Leaves*, it is the *Christabel* edition published in 1816.

IV

In April 1803 Coleridge travelled to London to see Longman about the third edition of his poems. Artistically speaking, this edition was a re-heated meal: no poems written since July 1797 were included. Either the anticipation of copyright issues over poems published elsewhere contributed to his lack of motivation, or he lacked the motivation to negotiate and resolve these problems. As a result, *Poems 1803* is interesting only for the amendments he made to individual poems: the slimmed-down version of 'The Eolian Harp', for example, is particularly successful.²⁶

But while he was in London, he also had a proposal to publish 'Christabel'. Manuscripts of 'Christabel' had been in circulation and the poem was building up a word-of-mouth mystique, thanks to recitations by Coleridge himself, and any other admirers of the poem who were lucky enough to have a manuscript version.²⁷ So, in April 1803, Coleridge wrote to his wife from London:

Sotheby [... has] informed me, that ten gentlemen, who have met me at his House, desired him to solicit me to finish the Christabel, & to permit them to publish it for me/ & they engaged that it should be in paper, printing, & decorations the most magnificent Thing that had hitherto appeared.—Of course, I declined it. The lovely Lady shan't come to that pass!—Many times rather would I have it printed at Soulby's on the true Ballad Paper/" (CL II 941)

This is a fascinating reversal from the deluxe edition he had been pitching to Longman in 1801. To understand this aesthetic U-turn we need to see exactly what he had in mind. Anthony Soulby was a printer based in Penrith, and the two illustrations reproduced here (both tentatively dated 1800 in the British Library catalogue) give a tantalising glimpse of an imaginary Soulby edition of 'Christabel'.

The Wandering Jew shown in *Figure 5* depicts a character close to the heart of both Coleridge and Wordsworth. The "true ballad paper" he refers to, unfortunately cannot be demonstrated here. It is coarse, thick fibrous stuff, which feels as if it has been made out of wholemeal flour with added roughage. The example shown in *Figure 6*, *Curious History of Tom Hickathrift, the Wonder of the World!!!* is another delightful example of this earthy wood-cut style. This is a

²⁶ See my 'The Eolian Harp', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, New Series 17 (NS) Summer 2001, 1-26, pp. 13-15.

²⁷ See Chris Koenig-Woodyard, 'A Hypertext History of the Transmission of Coleridge's 'Christabel', 1800-1816' *Romanticism On the Net* 10 <<http://www.sul.stanford.edu/mirrors/romnet/xtabel.html>> to which I am greatly indebted.

world away from the refined work of Bewick and his pupils who revived the skill of delicate wood engraving.²⁸ Was Coleridge joking here? If so, it is a wonderful matrimonial moment, at a difficult time in their relationship—a sign that they still had common reference points. Perhaps *Tom Hickathrift* was one of the five-and-a-half-year-old Hartley's favourite story books.²⁹

There is a serious point to this. We can draw a parallel with the marginal glosses he put into the revised 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' that was to be published in *Sibylline Leaves*. It is another way of framing or "antiquing" his text. And it also points to Coleridge thinking about his 'legend' as having its roots in the black-letter ballad tradition—in romance, and not in polite or polished literature.³⁰ But the Soulby 'Christabel', alas, is no more than an enticing mirage "in the hot sands of this Wilderness, the World!"

The completion of 'Christabel' continued to be promised to its admirers and Coleridge made some wild claims about its progress. Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, published in 1805 gave him a terrible jolt as it seemed to have stolen his originality; and the reproaches he suffered for not finishing 'Christabel', must lie behind a claim he made to Dorothy Wordsworth in 1807: "I have [...] about doubled the length of Christabel—2 thirds are finished" (CL III 39). Based on his previous claim of having written over 1400 lines, this would mean he has now written 2800 lines and expects the finished version to amount to 4200 lines. There is no evidence outside these unsubstantiated claims that 'Christabel' was ever more than the 677 lines that were finally published, but such is the spell of Coleridge's imagination that at least one reputable scholar has clung to a belief in the existence of a lost work of greater length.³¹

V

And so we move forward to 1815. Coleridge is now engaged with his *Sibylline Leaves* project of gathering up his scattered poems and publishing them with an introductory essay that becomes so long it evolves into a separate work, *Biographia Literaria*. The snag is, at present he has no publisher but the printing is being arranged and financed by two old friends. At this stage he still doesn't want to publish 'Christabel' in this collection, because it isn't finished.

²⁸ See Graver for a contemporaneous example of how crucial changes to illustrations could be to a book's reception. In *The Farmer's Boy*, the changes were from rusticity to gentility. STC's contemplated change is the other way round.

²⁹ I am grateful to Duncan Wu for pointing out to me that Anthony Soulby, bookseller and bookbinder, was also the proprietor of the Penrith Book Club through which Wordsworth obtained an edition of Burns' poems for Dorothy in 1787. W's guardians bought books on his behalf from Soulby in the 1780's, and in 1802 Soulby bound W's Chaucer. Judging from Dorothy's Journal, it seems Soulby's binding was as rustic as his woodcuts: "The Chaucer not only misbound but a leaf or two wanting" (DWJ 84). See Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 23, 47+n, 73, 85, 170n.

³⁰ I owe this sentence to Graham Davidson.

³¹ See Arthur H. Nethercot, *The Road to Ttrymeraine: A Study of the History, Background, and Purposes of Coleridge's "Christabel"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, repr. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), p.14, where, totally in thrall to Coleridge's imagination, he describes Coleridge's unsubstantiated claims as "incontrovertible evidence" of the existence of a longer poem.

THE
WANDERING
JEW:

OR, THE
SHOEMAKER OF JERUSALEM.

To which is added,
ANNA, Favourite SONG.



Penrith : Printed by Anthony Soulby.

Figure 5 Towards a Christabel "printed at Soulby's on the true Ballad Paper".

By permission of the British Library, Shelburne Cup 408147.(10)

CURIOUS HISTORY
OF
Tom Hickathrift,
THE
Wonder of the World!!

PART FIRST.



Penrith: Printed and sold by Anthony South.

Tom Hick

Figure 6: Soulby chapbook c.1800.
See my Hartley Coleridge's Reading 1801-1804 (Cumae: Sibylline Press, forthcoming)

By permission of the British Library, Shellmark: Ch.800/270

What can be done here? He can't finish the poem; he won't publish it as it is. It would take a miracle worker to change this state of affairs. Enter Lord Byron.³²

It was Coleridge's first literary hero, William Lisle Bowles, who suggested in 1815 that he apply to Byron for help. Why? The reason Coleridge gave was that Byron might be able to provide help in negotiating terms with a publisher. But there may have been hope of something more: it's possible that word was getting around that Byron, in his aristocratic magnificence, had refused to accept any payment from his publisher John Murray for his poems, although these were selling in unprecedented quantities. Certainly, a year later approaches were made to Byron to distribute his rejected literary earnings among needy authors such as Coleridge, Godwin and Maturin, and Byron readily agreed.³³ Murray, as we shall see later, did not like the plan at all (CL IV 622).

The letter Coleridge wrote to Byron, from his home at Calne during Easter week 1815, is a litany of self-confessed petitionary grovelling:

My Lord

I feel that I am taking a liberty for which I shall have but small excuse and no justification to offer, if I am not fortunate enough to find one in your Lordship's approbation of my design; and unless you should condescend to regard the writer as addressing himself to your Genius rather than your Rank, and graciously permit me to forget my total inacquaintance with your Lordship personally in my familiarity with your other more permanent Self, to which your works have introduced me. (CL IV 559)

After praising Byron's genius to the skies, he then catches himself and apologises:

Excuse my Lord! the length and 'petitionary' solemnity of this Preface, as attributable to the unquiet state of my spirits, under which I write this Letter, and my fears as to its final reception. Anxiety makes us all ceremonious. (CL IV 560)

He then recites his terrible hard luck story including every financial deal with every publisher that has ever gone sour on him, and in the midst of this, he makes his request: that Byron boost the offer price for his proposed collected works. This is how it would work:

³² I am greatly indebted throughout these next two sections to information provided by Virginia Murray, the archivist of the John Murray Archive, and to Andrew Nicholson who provided extracts from his forthcoming edition of *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, and shared his knowledge of the period.

³³ Cit Nicholson. The scheme first appears in a January 1816 letter from Sir James Mackintosh to Samuel Rogers. Mackintosh, "knowing the noble use which [Byron] has hitherto made of the produce of his works", asks Rogers to propose Godwin to Byron as a beneficiary. P. W. Clayden, *Rogers and his Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, 1889) I 211.

[If] you could with inward satisfaction recommend them to some respectable Publisher (I should rather it were *not* Longman) your weight in society and the splendour of your name would, I am convinced [...] treble the amount of their offer, and [they would] be ashamed to propose such terms to your Lordship as without remorse they would attempt to extort a concession to from my poverty. (CL IV 561)

Byron's immediate reply is gracious and charming:

Dear Sir,—It will give me great pleasure to comply with your request, though I hope there is still taste enough left amongst us to render it almost unnecessary, sordid and interested as, it must be admitted, many of “the trade” are, where circumstances give them an advantage. (BLJ IV 285-6)

Six months later Coleridge replies to this letter, when he is able to provide more details about the proposed publication. Byron's response again is immediate: “Dear Sir—Your letter I have just received.—I will willingly do whatever you direct about the volumes in question.” (BLJ IV 318-9). He then makes an unexpected request of his own:

Last Spring I saw W[alte]r Scott—he repeated to me a considerable portion of an unpublished poem of yours—the wildest & finest I ever heard in that kind of composition—the title he did not mention—but I think the heroine's name was Geraldine—at all events, the “toothless mastiff bitch”—& the “witch Lady”—the description of the hall—the lamp suspended from the image—& more particularly of the *Girl* herself as she went forth in the evening—all took a hold on my imagination which I shall never wish to shake off.—I mention this—not for the sake of boring you with compliments—but as a prelude to the hope that this poem is or is to be in the volumes you are now about to publish. (ibid)

And finally, the sting in the tail:

W[alter] Scott is a staunch & sturdy admirer of yours—& with a just appreciation of your capacity—deplored to me the want of inclination & exertion which prevented you from giving full scope to your mind. (ibid)

He knew how to press Coleridge's buttons. Was that Scott reference instinct or cunning? Coleridge responded instantly with an offer to have a

transcription of the poem sent to Byron.³⁴ ‘Christabel’, he wrote “is not yet a Whole: and as it will be 5 Books, I meant to publish it by itself: or with another poem.”³⁵ Note that “meant”, in the past tense: Byron hath his will. But, as his letter proceeds, Coleridge reveals to what extent this mention of “want of Inclination and Exertion” has stung him: excuses and alibis gush out for two passionate pages of his *Collected Letters*. By the end he is so unhinged that he signs off:

I trust your Lordship will excuse this I myself I scrawl from
your Lordship’s | obliged

S. T. Coleridge. (CL IV 606)

This is not so much Mr Micawber, as Basil Fawley in full meltdown—crawling not scrawling from his Lordship’s imagined presence.

The icing on the cake is Byron’s letter acknowledging receipt of the manuscript. “Dear Sir—I have “the Christabelle” safe—& am glad to see it in such progress—surely a little effort would complete the poem.” (BLJ IV 321). Did he write that with a wicked grin, or was he being obtuse? Byron’s combination of wit, warmth and generosity is heart-winning; he sent Coleridge £100 in the early stages of this brief relationship, when he was himself in financial difficulties. After Coleridge had finally met Byron face to face, he wrote breathless reports:

If you had seen Lord Byron, you could scarcely disbelieve him—so beautiful a countenance I scarcely ever saw—his teeth so many stationary smiles—his eyes the open portals of the sun—things of light, and for light—and his forehead so ample and yet so flexible. (CL IV 641).

Byron, without letting Coleridge know, passed the ‘Christabel’ manuscript to John Murray, his publisher, urging him to take on its publication (BLJ V 331). Byron was so important to Murray’s business that he may well have felt unable to refuse him. Given that Coleridge had already included Murray, in his first letter to Byron, as one of the publishers who had treated him badly, this may not have been a wise decision. To explain this, I must now back-track to 1812 to show how awkward relations between Coleridge and Murray were from the very beginning.

³⁴ “As it existed before my voyage to the Mediterranean”, STC added, thus allowing for the possibility (unstated of course) that there may have been more written subsequently.

³⁵ It is worth dwelling on the truly Sibylline nature of this “other poem” that STC presents to Byron in this letter. The poem is entitled ‘The Wanderings of Cain’, “of which, however, as far as it was written, I have unfortunately lost the only copy—and can remember no part distinctly but the first stanza:— [...] Sir G. Beaumont, I remember, thought it the most impressive of my compositions—and I shall probably compose it over again.” (CL IV 601-2) Priceless. Byron, of course, eventually did the job for him.

VI

John Murray was enjoying great success at this period, particularly since the unprecedented sales of Byron's *Childe Harold*, which he had published in 1812. If ever one of this new generation of publishers had a claim to being a gentleman, rather than a tradesman, it was Murray. His aspiration is best captured in the painting commissioned by himself to record the meeting arranged by himself in 1815 between the two literary superstars of the age, Lord Byron and Walter Scott. The painting shows him sitting contentedly in his famous Albemarle Street drawing room, the proud but discreet ringmaster, surrounded by his circle of literary luminaries.

In August 1812, Coleridge wrote to Murray proposing an anthology of translated extracts from lesser-known works by classic authors such as Cervantes and Boccaccio. His letter began: "I have been unlucky in never finding you at home when I have called" (CL III 417). This suggests there had already been some discourtesy on Murray's part, either in not being "at home", or in not returning calls.

Coleridge next wrote to Murray in August 1814. He had heard through Lamb that Murray wanted Goethe's *Faust* translated and that "certain partial friends" had induced Murray to think that he, Coleridge, was the man for the job. After lengthy humming and hawing about the work involved, and his reluctance to bring his "*Intellect to the Market*", Coleridge got to the point:

I should like to attempt the translation—if you will mention your Terms, at once and irrevocably (for I am an idiot at Bargaining & shrink from the very Thought) I will return an answer by the next Post, whether in my present Circumstances I can or cannot undertake it. (CL III 523)

Murray wrote back offering him £100, and the self-confessed "idiot at bargaining" immediately did exactly what he said he wouldn't do: he started to haggle and whinge. "Considering the necessary Labor", he wrote, "the terms proposed are humiliatingly low" (CL III 523). After reiterating how much work was involved, he started defending himself against accusations in the *Quarterly Review* (Murray's own periodical) that he was "neglecting & misusing [his] Powers". His defence included a crafty appeal to a precedent set by Goethe: "The Faust, you perhaps know, is only a *Fragment*—whether Goethe ever will finish it, or whether it is even his object to do, is quite unknown." (CL III 525). After raising at great length all kinds of objections against the advisability of the scheme, he asked for 100 guineas—a mere £5 more than Murray's original offer. We don't know what Murray wrote back, but Coleridge's next letter begins "I cannot persuade myself, that I can have offended you by my openness", and goes on to propose various alternative publishing schemes for Murray's consideration (CL III 528). Coleridge later

complained to Byron that Murray “did not even condescend to return [...] an answer” to this letter (CL IV 562). Needless to say, the *Faust* translation did not go ahead.

Later that year, in December 1814, Henry Crabb Robinson, a great admirer and promoter of the unpublished ‘Christabel’, recited it to three guests including John Murray and recorded in his diary that they were “the first of my hearers who have not relished the poem”.³⁶ Murray’s opinion may have been coloured by his previous dealings with Coleridge, or perhaps he just didn’t like the poem. Either way, this was the far from ideal situation between these two men when Byron on 4 November 1815, without letting Coleridge know, asked Murray to take on the publication of ‘Christabel’ (BLJ V 331).

Murray responded to Byron’s request the same day, writing: “Coleridge is will [*sic*] & fanciful & will make much talk and I will gladly make a bidding when I can have the remainder as well to judge of *quantity* as quality.”³⁷ It is not clear whether Murray really expected the “remainder” to materialise, or was giving himself room to manoeuvre. There was also the question of how enthusiastic he really was about the poem, and how far he felt duty bound to keep in with Byron. He must have confided something about such impositions to Blackwood, a close Edinburgh colleague, because Blackwood wrote back to him on 1 January 1816: “I really pity you when I think of the difficulty you must often have in managing with authors, and *particularly with the friends of authors whom you wish to oblige*.” (MJM I 454-5 emphasis added). Blackwood referred specifically to Leigh Hunt in this letter, another author foisted on Murray by Byron, but the plural gives his complaint a wider application. Murray also experienced another more terrible vexation from Byron that same month when, as mentioned above, Byron asked him to send part of the money he had turned down to other needy authors, of whom Coleridge was one. Murray sent Byron an indignant letter—the offer had been a *gift* tendered to Byron, and was not transferable (MJM I 355-6).

Murray called on Coleridge at his London lodgings three months after this, on 12 April 1816, to discuss terms for the publication of ‘Christabel’. After this meeting, although Coleridge later protested that he published with reluctance solely because he needed the seventy guineas offered, he seems to have been reassured that Murray would in time also become the publisher of future works, including *Sibylline Leaves* and *Biographia Literaria*.³⁸ And then Coleridge started treating Murray less cautiously. Borrowing books from him may have been standard practice, but another use he made of Murray was surely not wise at this tender stage in their relationship. Three days after his

³⁶ Cit. Koenig-Woodyard, John Murray section, from Henry Crabb Robinson, *On Books and Their Writers*, ed. by Edith J. Morley, 3 vols (London: Dent, 1938), I, 157.

³⁷ Andrew Nicholson’s transcription (hereafter AN in parentheses in text). See also Samuel Smiles, *Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1891), I, 357. (Hereafter MJM in parentheses in text).

³⁸ £73 10s according to Ledger B fol. 118, Murray Archives.

meeting with Murray, Coleridge moved to Highgate and put himself under the care of Dr Gillman who was to control his opium intake. After eight days of Gillman's rehab regime, he cracked and tried to arrange for Murray to act as an unwitting clandestine intermediary between him and his chemist. He wrote to Murray asking him to send a sealed note enclosed in his letter to a certain address; the unspecified packages that would be delivered to Murray's premises as a result, were to be carefully wrapped inside the innocent book parcels that Murray was due to send him. This arrangement became the subject of gossip (CL IV 633-4). Such a transparent attempt to use Murray for surreptitious purposes, without asking his consent, must have grated on him horribly.

Not long after this, on 25 May 1816, 'Christabel' was finally published with two other poems that Coleridge linked with his opium use: 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Pains of Sleep'. His introductory preface framed the poem with Sibylline skill: "I had the whole present to my mind, with the wholeness, no less than with the liveliness of a vision; I trust that I shall be able to embody in verse the three parts yet to come, in the course of the present year." (PW II 625). This, and the similar but better known preface to 'Kubla Khan', were to launch Coleridge into the popular imagination of posterity, in a way that could never have been foreseen at the time.

Evidence of the edition's success on the material plane has survived in the ledger preserved at Albemarle Street: *Christabel* made a profit of £120 16s 6d. Three small editions were printed within 8 months. Caution was evident even in the first edition which appears from the ledger to have been run off in two batches: 1000 followed by 500 both of which are described as the first edition. Two further editions of 500 each then followed. The starting price had been 3s 6d per copy but 517 copies were sold in December at the knock down price of 1s each, perhaps to sell off all the remaining stock.³⁹

After publication it fell victim to hostile reviews, a subject that lies outside the scope of this article except to say that the attribution of the *Edinburgh Review's* mauling of *Christabel* to Thomas Moore does not have unanimous support.⁴⁰ Did Murray support it? Did Murray even want it to succeed? Given his complicated relationship with Byron, Murray might have enjoyed the prospect of reproaching him with the failure of the poem whose publication (and whose author) had been foisted on him against his own inclinations. If one views the Coleridge—Murray dealings in isolation, suspicions about a

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ There is a confident attribution in J. R. De J. Jackson, *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1970) p.226, and such central Coleridgean works as Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998) p. 438, and J.C.C. Mays, CPW II 623, provide no supporting argument when referring to Moore's supposed authorship. Andrew Nicholson (personal communication to author) points out his view that Moore's authorship was shown to be extremely unlikely when two previously unknown letters of his came to light in 1962, citing Wilfred S. Dowden, 'Thomas Moore and the Review of Christabel', *Modern Philology* 60 (1962): pp. 47-50, and *The Letters of Thomas Moore*, ed. by Wilfred S. Dowden, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 394-5, and more recently Jeffery W. Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2001), pp. 192 and 230n.

Machiavellian role for Murray can arise, but there is not enough evidence to condemn him. Even when Coleridge complained to Murray that his (Murray's) periodical the *Quarterly Review* was "ashamed to say a word in ['Christabel's] favor" (CL IV 716-7), this is not necessarily proof of Murray's lack of support: his influence over his periodical was limited.⁴¹

Murray comes out with honour in relations about this time with impecunious authors such as Maturin and Hogg, towards whom he was generous and patient.⁴² He was much more than a shrewd business man: the pride revealed in the arranged meeting of Byron and Scott was to a great extent the pride of a fan at being an instrumental part of the circle of authors he admired. We could cite political differences, but Murray managed a working relationship with Robert Southey whose political affiliations were different. His reservations about Coleridge seem personal, and can clearly be seen in the disparaging comments he made to Byron about 'Christabel' early in September 1816.⁴³ Murray may have been upset by Coleridge's article in the *Courier* attacking the management of Drury Lane Theatre for putting on Maturin's *Bertram*.⁴⁴ Maturin was a rival to Coleridge in two ways: he had received the patronage of Byron and Murray, and Drury Lane Theatre had recently rejected Coleridge's own play, *Zapolya*.

Thus, when Coleridge appeared to behave badly over a £100 payment he had received towards the publication of *Zapolya* and other unspecified works, Murray was quick to write to Byron on 18 March 1817 to tell him that "Ward says that Coleridge is Summum Borium—he has cheated me out of a tragedy for wch I gave him £100" (AN). Coleridge, genuinely upset by the double dealing of his new publisher, Thomas Curtis, who was mostly responsible for this episode, in fact refunded £50 of this to Murray a week after this letter was written (CL IV 716-7). Byron himself was incensed when he later read Coleridge's extended criticism of Maturin's play in chapter twenty-three of *Biographia Literaria* (BLJ V 267). He felt it was "shabby", and it is hard to disagree: Coleridge's comments matched the *Edinburgh Review*'s attack on 'Christabel' for spite and pettiness.

In 1825 Coleridge tried to explain how things stood between himself and Murray after further negotiations with him had come to nought, and wrote of his "smooth *courtierly* insolence" (CL V 451). His stark conclusion earlier that same year, "I feel, that he does not like me" (CL V 438) seems unarguable. He did however acknowledge in a letter to Murray written shortly after the *Zapolya* incident that he had behaved with "kindness and courtesy" towards him when he first arrived in London (CL IV 718). Clearly Murray had done his best to

⁴¹ Caroline Franklin's, *Byron: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 52-5 describes the complexity of Murray's role as mediator between Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*, and Byron.

⁴² E.g., MJM I 228 – Murray writing to Walter Scott enlisting support for Maturin; MJM I 349 – Murray advancing money to Hogg.

⁴³ Murray's letter has not survived, but Byron responded "I won't have you sneer at Christabel" (BLJ V 108).

⁴⁴ Valerie Purton, *A Coleridge Chronology* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 109.

behave properly. There is a curious postscript to this ill-starred relationship: in 1835, after Coleridge's death, Murray acquired a copy of the Phillips painting of Coleridge for display among his other literary portraits; evidently he didn't bear grudges, and awarded Coleridge a posthumous place in the Parnassus of Albermarle Street.⁴⁵

Leaving aside all this, the 1816 edition of *Christabel* had no creative enthusiasm put into it. A 64 page octavo pamphlet, with no illustrations or any other nice details such as the "vignettes etc." that had Wordsworth exclaiming "I long to have the book in my hand; it will be such a Beauty". But ironically, the printing, as can be seen from its title page, was undertaken by William Bulmer & Co., the "*Bulmerian* Press" that had made Wordsworth so enthusiastic fifteen years earlier. Somehow it seems appropriate that even the publication of 'Christabel' leaves us looking beyond—for something more perfect that Coleridge has sown in our imagination. This may be what is meant by his "brilliant unfulfillment": his capacity to show us the treasures we think he hasn't delivered.

VII

I will end with a brief note on Coleridge's continued preoccupation with the unfinished 'Christabel'. At the end of August 1816, three months after its publication, he was writing: "By the Sea side I hope to finish my Christabel" (CL IV 663), and throughout the rest of his life there are repeated references to this hope that what came to be his regular summer holiday at Ramsgate would provide the necessary leisure and a correspondent breeze of creativity.⁴⁶ Perhaps as a nod to Byron, or to literary fashion, Coleridge's terminology for 'Christabel's component sections was changed from "books" to "cantos". More importantly perhaps, and in what must surely be the only instance of Coleridge scaling *down* a fantasy, he would tell his hearers late in life that the poem (whose completion was of course precisely mapped out in his mind) would be four cantos long.⁴⁷ How the five book version trumpeted in 1815 got reduced to four in Coleridge's imagination is a further mystery to ponder.

And so Coleridge, once more on holiday in Ramsgate in October 1823, wrote in his notebook: "Were I free to do so, I feel as if I could compose the third part of Christabel, or the song of her desolation.—" (CNB IV 5032). He was in fact up to his ears in revising *Aids to Reflection*, but that sigh captures the imagination, and may be felt in a poem he did complete at Ramsgate that month: 'Youth and Age'.

⁴⁵ Morton Paley, *Portraits of Coleridge* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p.143.

⁴⁶ The Ramsgate scene evokes a moving section in Holmes *Darker Reflections*, p.505-6, and the entire story has been reconstructed in Allan Clayton, *Wish You Were Here: Coleridge's Holidays at Ramsgate, 1819-1833*, (Ramsgate: Clayton, 2001).

⁴⁷ James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Pickering, 1838), pp. 301-2.

To set the scene, we should imagine Coleridge stealing some leisure from the proofs of *Aids to Reflection*, thinking of the ‘Christabel’ he could never complete, falling into a creative reverie, and allowing this poem instead to play on his consciousness. The opening two lines leap into significance when approached from this perspective. The first word “VERSE” (doubly emphasised by small capitals and metrical stress) is a sigh, a fleeting mood of compositional longing, a regret for the ‘Christabel’ that is unfinishable now he has lost the youth of his poetical vigour.

VERSE, a Breeze mid blossoms straying,
 Where HOPE clung feeding, like a Bee—
 Both were mine! Life went a maying
 With NATURE, HOPE, and POESY
 When I was young!
When I was young?—Ah, woful WHEN!
 Ah for the Change ‘twixt Now and Then!
 This breathing House not built with hands,
 This body that does me grievous wrong,
 O’er aery Cliffs and glittering Sands,
 How lightly *then* it flashed along:—
 Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore,
 On winding Lakes and Rivers wide,
 That ask no aid of Sail or Oar,
 That fear no spite of Wind or Tide!
 Nought cared this Body for wind or weather
 When YOUTH and I liv’d in’t together.⁴⁸

Any apparent dejection is tempered with a calm acceptance: he takes great pleasure, like the Sibyl he is, in evoking what has been lost.

⁴⁸ CPW I 1012. (using the version published in 1828).