8

DEIRDRE COLEMAN

The journalist

When I hear of the French casting *cannon*, I think nothing of that at all, provided you can only prevent them from casting *types*.

(Charles Stuart to Henry Dundas, 1793)¹

When it came to the power and influence of the daily press, and the crucial role of newspaper offices in supplying politicians with the latest intelligence, especially in war-time, Charles Stuart knew what he was talking about. One of a trio of entrepreneurial Scottish brothers who descended on London in the 1780s to make their fortunes in printing and publishing, Charles was firmly and lucratively ensconced in the pay of the Treasury, as was his brother Peter, proprietor of a ministerial paper and eager servant of whatever party was in power.² The third brother was Daniel Stuart, editor–proprietor of the *Morning Post*, the daily London newspaper whose founding in 1772 has been described as one of the most significant events in the history of journalism.³ When Stuart purchased the *Morning Post* in 1795 its circulation had declined to 350 copies per day. Within three years, he had increased this to 2,000 copies per day, reaching an unprecedented sale of 4,500 copies per day in 1803, the year he sold it and bought the evening paper, the *Courier*. Coleridge wrote prose and verse for both of Daniel Stuart's newspapers, but his best efforts were for the *Morning Post* during its period of spectacular recovery,⁴ starting with poetry contributions in 1797 and rising to essays and leading columns in 1800. So successful were Coleridge's essays at this time, particularly his astute psychological anatomy of William Pitt (March 1800), that he appears to have been offered a proprietary interest in the paper (*EOT* 1, lx). David Erdman has collected together Coleridge's prose contributions to both the *Morning Post* and the *Courier* in three substantial volumes, and written a lengthy and fascinating introduction, tracking the mazy and sometimes tortuous twists and turns of Coleridge's early political engagement, as he struggled to remain an admirer of the French Revolution whilst deploring France's invasion of Switzerland in 1798. A simple way of measuring the oscillating temperature

of Coleridge's politics at this time, from violently red-hot to temperate, is to read the two poems he contributed to the *Morning Post* within three months of each other: 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' (January 1798) and 'Recantation: An Ode' (April 1798) (see CPW 1, 237-40, 243-7).

The political fray, the speed of print circulation, the power and influence of newspaper writing: all these were as powerfully attractive to Coleridge as to the Stuart brothers. This is particularly clear in the mid-1790s, when Coleridge stepped forward as a radical young lecturer, preacher, and journalist. In a lecture of 1795, attacking the two recent Government Bills designed to restrict the right of assembly and the free discussion (and publication) of political issues, he declared himself stoutly for the unfettered liberty of the press and freedom of speech. The evil of the Gagging Acts (as they were popularly called) lay in their destruction of the nation's entire nervous system: 'By the almost winged communication of the Press, the whole nation becomes one grand Senate, fervent yet untumultuous... By the operation of Lord Grenville's Bill, the Press is made useless. Every town is insulated: the vast conductors are destroyed by which the electric fluid of truth was conveyed from man to man, and nation to nation' (*Lects.* 1795, 313).⁵ For certain ruling-class observers, however, Coleridge's 'fluid of truth' was a toxic substance inciting the lower classes to sedition and insurrection. Nor did the influence of the press seem confined (as Coleridge suggests) to the international, European scene; some believed it even operated at the imperial margins. In the 1788 debate in the House of Lords on a Bill to regulate the trade in and transport of African slaves, the Duke of Chandos complained that in Jamaica the 'negroes read the English newspapers as constantly as the ships from England came in'. From the debates in both Houses they would (he regretted) be tempted to conclude that their emancipation was at hand.⁶

Coleridge's excitement about the speed and reach of newspaper influence peaked at the very moment Wordsworth was decrying the reading public's 'craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies'.⁷ But what particularly captivated Coleridge in 1800 was the flattering reflection that what the individual journalist 'writes at 12 at night will before 12 hours is over have perhaps 5 or 6000 Readers!... Few Wine merchants can boast of creating more sensation.' The intoxicification was at its most intense when words approximated political deeds, when (as Coleridge boasted to one correspondent in 1800) he could hear bandied about his own 'particular phrases in the House of Commons' as if he were 'grand Monopolist of all good Reasons!' (CL 1, 569).⁸ Coleridge's self-aggrandisement as journalist could sometimes assume grotesque proportions, such as the suggestion that his *Morning Post* essays had been

single-handedly responsible for re-starting the war between England and France in 1802, or his claim that, when he was in Italy in 1806, Napoleon was determined to hunt him down and punish him personally.⁹ But the odd moment of high drama could not make up for the many flat times, when journalism seemed nothing more than pure drudgery: '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' (CL 1, 569). At such times journalism was no more than a 'bread and beef' occupation, 'the absolute necessity of scribbling prose' in conflict with the higher and more enduring achievements of, say, poetry or philosophy (CL 1, 635, 545). Even the 'immediate, & wide impression' guaranteed by speedy circulation was often, Coleridge had to concede, only 'transitory' (CL 1, 582). Frequently troubled by the ephemeral nature of journalism, he considered a pamphlet re-issue of his *Morning Post* essays (CL 1, 627), and even book publication of his most admired pieces, to be entitled 'The Men and the Times' (CN 1, 1577, 1646).

Neither plan materialised, principally because of Coleridge's ambivalence about the 'trade' of journalism, and the accompanying suspicion that his newspaper essays for the *Post* and the *Courier* were not worth collecting (CL 1, 623), a view seconded by E. P. Thompson in our own time.¹⁰ By referring to the '*Press as a Trade*' Coleridge meant 'reviewing, newspaper-writing, and all those things in which I proposed no fame to myself or permanent good to Society' (CL 1, 372). Despite his denigration of paid writing as inferior to the pursuit of fame and the greater good of society, Coleridge was not greatly troubled by the close link between writing and commerce. Of course, like all professional writers, he jibbed at the dependency upon 'Vampire Booksellers' and 'Scorpion Critics' (CL 1, 185), but he knew he possessed marketable skills, and in the early years he insisted on the proper fee for his hire. When James Perry of the *Morning Chronicle* invited him to London to write for him in 1796, Coleridge declined, suspecting that the editor wanted to employ him 'as a mere Hireling without any *proportionate* Share of the Profits' (CL 1, 226). With so many editors in the pay of political factions, hired writing was an on-going and very real pressure, exposing one to great anxieties and uncertainties, and 'many temptations to do evil', Coleridge confessed; it also made it difficult to preserve 'a delicacy of moral feeling and moral perception' (CL 1, 376). This vexed issue of independence became especially acute later in his life, during periods of illness or low confidence, leading Thompson to conclude that 'Coleridge never used his opportunities in the national press; he was always *used*.'¹¹ One such low point was 1811, the year he wrote for T. G. Street's *Courier*, a newspaper generally regarded at this time as 'a vane fixed on the pivot of ministerial policy'.¹²

Finally, writing for a newspaper, whether his own or someone else's, involved Coleridge in the pressure of deadlines, the hasty business of having 'to publish as well as to compose extempore', without time for second thoughts and revision. Although he conceded the necessity of deadlines in order to complete a task, Coleridge projected himself as temperamentally unsuited to task work: 'O way-ward and desultory Spirit of Genius! ill canst thou brook a task-master! The tenderest touch from the hand of *Obligation* wounds thee, like a scourge of Scorpions!' (CL I, 186).

In addition to writing for the two big London dailies, the *Morning Post* and the *Courier*, Coleridge ran two newspapers of his own, the *Watchman* (1796) and the *Friend* (1809-10). Both were weeklies, although the *Watchman* was published every eighth day in order to avoid the stamp-tax (BL I, 179), an improvisation which was to become characteristic of the versatile and expanding radical weekly press in the early nineteenth century.¹³ Although written in very different circumstances, with different aims and audiences in mind, there are some striking links between these two newspapers, particularly in terms of the very personal way in which they pitch themselves to targeted audiences. The two papers are also linked through Coleridge's concern to argue for the continuities and consistency of his political position over the years. Notably, he paid tribute in the *Friend* to the impossible idealism of Pantisocracy, the utopian scheme devised by himself and Robert Southey to settle an egalitarian community on the banks of the Susquehanna. Visionary and strange this idea may have been 'yet to the intense interest and impassioned zeal, which called forth and strained every faculty of my intellect for the organization and defence of this Scheme, I owe much of whatever I at present possess, my clearest insight into the nature of individual Man, and my most comprehensive views of his social relations' (*Friend* II, 146-7). Coleridge's journalistic activities during 1794 and 1795 were crucial to the 'organization and defence' of Pantisocracy. There was, of course, the question of financing the scheme, and the Bristol lectures of 1795 on politics, religion and history were explicitly designed with that purpose in mind. But, more importantly, Coleridge's profound commitment to the pantisocratic ideal entailed intensive philosophical and moral thinking about the nature of the self and contemporary society, speculations which fuelled and shaped his activities at this time. Nor, when Southey's departure for Portugal definitively scuppered the Susquehanna Pantisocratic scheme in mid 1795, did Coleridge cease to hope that he might re-establish Pantisocracy, albeit in a new guise. The geographical location of Pantisocracy had already migrated, from America to a farm in Wales, so there was nothing to stop Coleridge wishing for 'a Pantisocracy in England' too, as he confided to a friend in March 1795 (CL I, 155). But in the end, Pantisocracy was about

not so much an ideal location as an ideal of male friendship. For Coleridge, friendship, intimate and domestic, was the necessary starting-point of social life, 'the *center* of the Ball' which would then grow bigger in time, fostered by warm feelings of benevolence and philanthropy: 'I love my *Friend* – such as *he* is, all mankind are or *might be*!' (CL 1, 86).

This highly personal and idealistic view of friendship coloured much of Coleridge's thinking, including his reflections on the dynamics of the writer-reader relationship. Much has been written of the transition in the eighteenth century from a system of patronage to that of the impersonal commercial marketplace, but both of Coleridge's newspapers involved the informal and often generous patronage of friends, together with subscription schemes which were designed to deliver a fraternity of like-minded supporters, bonded together in brotherly love. At the heart of each subscription scheme were known friends, sympathetic to Coleridge's aims, who would either personally sign up their friends or at least pave the way for Coleridge to do so. After the demise of Pantisocracy in the mid 1790s, Coleridge attempted to reconstitute its communitarianism, intimacy and friendship through what Jon Klancher has called 'an alternative society of the text'.¹⁴ No scheme was fool-proof against reader rejection, but in the rapidly expanding world of print Coleridge needed to feel that he knew his readers, that they had in some way been hand-picked for him, and that he had their unwavering confidence and support. This is particularly true of the period after Coleridge's return from Malta in 1806. The experimental design for his weekly newspaper the *Friend*, printed on stamped paper so as to go free to all parts of the Kingdom, reflects a dogged determination to 'find dispersedly what [he] could not hope to meet with collectively' (*Friend* II, 273), a community of élite readers who preferred instruction to amusement, and who did not shrink from hard brainwork.¹⁵ Incongruous as the newspaper format was for Coleridge's weighty and difficult essays, instant circulation offered him the chance of interacting with his readers in a 'friendly' way, monitoring and even taking into account their responses as the weeks passed. Daniel Stuart, irritated by his friend's newspaper ambitions, accused Coleridge of an unworthy 'desire of producing on the public and receiving on yourself an instant impression' (*Friend* II, 493), but it was not so much vanity as imperative psychological need which propelled Coleridge to undertake his strange experiment. For unlike Wordsworth who had the confidence and equanimity to look to posterity, believing that every great and original writer needed to create the audience by which he was to be appreciated, Coleridge craved the approval of his contemporaries. On his own admission, his was 'no self-subsisting Mind' but prone to 'faint away inwardly, self-deserted & bereft of the confidence in my own powers... the approbation & Sympathy of

good & intelligent men is my Sea-breeze, without which I would languish from Morn to evening' (CN II, 1054).

Throughout 1794 Coleridge and Southey spawned numerous plans for either selling their poetry to magazines and journals, or working as newspaper reporters. They also planned to start their own periodicals, one of which was to be called the *Citizen*, the other the *Provincial Magazine*. None of these plans came to very much, except the series of lectures delivered by the two young men in Bristol between January and June 1795. Coleridge's anti-war, anti-ministerial lectures appear to have caused a sensation. One newspaper trumpeted that 'he spoke in public what none had the courage in this city to do before, – he told Men that they have Rights' (*Lects.* 1795, xxxi); for this he incurred the 'furious and determined' antagonism of the Tories, but at the same time he became the darling of the oppositionists, so much so that when it came to setting up the *Watchman* Coleridge benefited enormously from the patronage of some of Bristol's leading Unitarian friends and fellow liberals. The alternative society which they offered Coleridge at this time was not just humanitarian, liberal and progressive; it was also a close-knit society with important links to the world of publishing and the book trade.¹⁶ An initial subscription fund enabled him to travel across the Midlands early in 1796, carrying with him letters of introduction which opened many doors throughout the well-off manufacturing towns of Worcester, Birmingham, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield. Wherever he went he found himself feted, even 'marvellously caressed' (CL I, 179). The cynosure of all eyes, he was 'the figurante of the circle', a ballet-dancer performing on demand. And whereas in Bristol he had been criticised for his slovenly person – lecturing in dirty stockings and sporting uncombed hair (*Lects.* 1795, xxx) – on the subscription tour he boasted that he 'christianized' himself, i.e. 'washed and changed' before meeting potential supporters (CL I, 175).

The year 1795, the year in which Coleridge lectured and planned for the *Watchman*, formed a precious interlude between euphoria and repression. At the end of 1794, the dissenting radicals Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke and John Thelwall had been tried by the State for treason and acquitted. A year later there would be renewed persecution in the shape of the Gagging Acts (November 1795), designed ('for the safety of his majesty's person') to stamp out seditious meetings. In the lull between, there is an ebullience and seamlessness to Coleridge's political and religious activities. Lecturing was a form of sermonising (and vice versa), and popular oratory merged into journalism. Already famous for his eloquence, Coleridge's 'talk' spilled over into print, creating many points of connection between the 1795 lectures and the *Watchman*. He even recycled some of his more successful and flamboyant lectures, such as the one against the slave trade, originally delivered in a

Bristol coffee-house on the Quay, within sight and sound of that prosperous city's slaving ships.¹⁷ Boycotting the consumption of sugar was one of the popular means of undermining the trade, a strategy Coleridge buttressed with unforgettably Gothic images of the guilty sipping tea 'sweetened with Brother's Blood', an act accompanied, not with music, but with shrieks and groanings, 'and the loud peals of the lash!' (*Watchman*, 139). There were also good legal reasons for translating talk into print. His first public lecture he was 'obliged to publish, it having been confidently asserted that there was Treason in it' (*CL* 1, 152). Although he claimed that the lecture was 'printed as it was delivered', he probably tempered some of its sentiments, for while publication was a safeguard against misrepresentation, it was also more risky than talk because more permanent. Later in the year, he revised it again under the new, lofty title of *Conciones Ad Populum, or Addresses to the People*. The blurring here of sermon and political address can be seen in the title of his pamphlet (a 'concio ad clerum' was a Latin sermon), but there was no blurring of its political message, the Preface declaring: 'Truth should be spoken at all times, but more especially at those times, when to speak Truth is dangerous' (*Lects.* 1795, 27).

In the *Watchman's* Prospectus, Coleridge advertised himself as the radical author of *Conciones* and 'The Plot Discovered', his incisive tract against the 'ministerial treason' of the Gagging Acts. He also selected a motto which continued the earlier emphasis on truth: 'That All may know the Truth; and that the Truth may make us free!' Determined to be the voice of opposition in the provinces, which were not well served except with ministerial rags, Coleridge unapologetically declared that the entire orientation of the *Watchman* was to be political; even its original essays and poetry, designed to complement the Parliamentary reports and the international and domestic news, were to be 'chiefly or altogether political' (*Watchman*, 5). Paradoxically, the emphasis on the daily-ness and immediacy of his newspaper's concerns co-existed with a concern for permanence, evident in the octavo format of the *Watchman*; the newspaper's Prospectus informs us that, whilst individual numbers would look and appear 'as regularly as a Newspaper' they could be 'bound up at the end of the year' so as to become 'an Annual Register', a less perishable and therefore more attractive 'vehicle' for 'Men of Letters' whose contributions he hoped to publish (*Watchman*, 5).

The years 1794–6 were famine years, with wheat more than doubling in price between May and July 1795,¹⁸ hence the emotive topos of hunger running through every number of the *Watchman*. Brilliantly, and dangerously, Coleridge links the scarcity, not to the failure of crops, but to an unjust war begun and supported 'by the rich and powerful' against the interests of the poor (*Watchman*, 54). For instance, the fashion for hair-powder, made of

flour, is linked to the shortage of bread, a seemingly preposterous connection until it is pointed out that the tax on the powder funds the war, a war which has caused the dearth in the first place. Similarly, in the high-spirited 'Essay on Fasts' (March 1796) which lost Coleridge so many subscribers, he introduced a topical joke into his discussion of fasting as one of the impurities introduced into Christianity by prelacy. Linking hunger to the Gagging Acts with a pun, he protested that 'by two recent Acts of Parliament the mouths of the poor have been *made fast* already' (*Watchman*, 54).¹⁹ Finally, hunger is linked both to insurrection and to the annihilation of the family as society's fundamental unit; this seemed especially true of Ireland's 'starving, oppressed, and degraded' peasants: 'If a man who labours from morning till night cannot *earn* bread to eat for himself and family, the bond of protection and obedience, the very end of society is broken' (*Watchman*, 118).

Despite the democratic egalitarianism and universalism of the *Watchman's* motto, 'That All may know the Truth; and that the Truth may make us free!', there were some for whom truth needed careful exposition, and others who were not qualified at all to receive it. The shilling fee at the door of his public lectures, designed 'to keep out blackguards', had already demonstrated some exclusivity (*Lects.* 1795, xxxi), and the *Watchman* was to continue the lecturer's cautious policy of pleading 'for the Oppressed, not to them' (*Lects.* 1795, 43). Coleridge's desire to address a polite rather than popular audience reflects the uncomfortably close connection for him at this time between intellectual radicalism and the popular societies, an anxiety exacerbated by his disbelief that truth could be smoothly communicated downwards from the educated to the labouring classes. Unlike Godwin, for whom society resembled a continuously linked chain along which truth moved without rupture, Coleridge firmly believed that connection and conversation only took place amongst the upper ranks, "the Nobility, Gentry, and People of Dress". Playfully mocking this fashionable group by attributing their description to a Perfumer's advertisement,²⁰ Coleridge nevertheless proceeds to make a serious point: 'But alas! between the Parlour and the Kitchen, the Tap and the Coffee-Room – there is a gulph that may not be passed' (*Lects.* 1795, 43). Writers in this period had a habit of characterising the class status of reading audiences according to where the act of reading took place, so Coleridge's paired oppositions of private and public space are revealing. For members of the ruling class, the taproom – that part of an alehouse where labouring-class men did their serious drinking and socialising – was one of the most feared and stigmatised sites of plebeian culture, with alehouses typically associated in the 1790s with conspiratorial and seditious Jacobinism.²¹ The coffee-house functions as the opposite in Coleridge's rhetoric, a site for the dissemination of news, certainly, but also for polite conversation and

genteel sociability. When writing for the *Morning Post* in 1800, for instance, Coleridge confessed to Stuart that he tailored his style to an imagined cohort of '[Lond]on Coffee house men & breakfast-table People of Quality'. While feeling a certain condescension towards the fashionable world of coffee-house philosophers and politicians, none of whom would welcome the rigours of 'austerest metaphysical [re]asoning' (CL 1, 627), Coleridge was obliged to concede their respectability and ply his trade of authorship amongst them. How accurately he imagined his newspaper audience in 1800 is questionable, however, for when his friend Thomas Poole offered Stuart an essay critical of male servants for their 'encroachments . . . on the employments of women',²² Stuart rejected it for the following reasons: 'The Livery Servants are a numerous body and very powerful among the Purchasers of the Morning Post. Very few families purchase a Newspaper which is not first read by the Servants, and their influence is great with respect to the circulation of Papers; at least their hostility might be very dangerous' (EOT III, 165).

The public house appears in the first number of the *Watchman* as the undesirable alternative to the private, domestic fire-side. Too poor to buy his own newspaper, the labourer flies to the alehouse for the news of the day, only to find biassed, ministerial prints; his opinions are then corrupted, he falls into bad company, and 'contracts habits of drunkenness and sloth' (*Watchman*, 11). Thus the taxes which make newspapers a luxury, and the alehouse which opens the world of print to the poor man, constitute serious 'impediments to the diffusion of Knowledge'. Coleridge then proceeds to outline the various means by which Providence counteracts these impediments, such as the 'large manufactories' where 'it is the custom for a newspaper to be regularly read'. At this point in his argument, faced with the vision of a large gathering of working men, 'whose passions are frequently inflamed by drunkenness', the 'coil of resistance' lurking in any Coleridgean commitment issues in an abrupt reverse,²³ with the hated Gagging Acts invoked positively for their potential to 'render the language of political publications more cool and guarded, or even confine us for a while to the teaching of first principles, or the diffusion of that general knowledge which should be the basis or substratum of politics' (*Watchman*, 13-14). Ultimately, Coleridge's fear of an unruly, uneducated, potentially violent mob moved him from youthful visions of the whole nation as one 'grand Senate', united by a free press, to middle-aged rumblings in 1814 against 'malcontents and pot-wise senators of alehouses' (EOT II, 377).

From the start the *Watchman* advertised itself as a miscellany, inviting its readers to become writers in a democratic and communal fashion, as though it were indeed a 'spacious coffee-house': 'The Miscellany is open to all *ingenious* men whatever their opinions may be', Coleridge informed his

readers (*Watchman*, 197).²⁴ This openness is paraded in Number v where Coleridge reprints an abusive letter by 'Caius Gracchus' which had been published in the *Bristol Gazette*. In refutation of Caius Gracchus's charges of prejudice and illiberality, Coleridge protests: 'I ought to be considered in two characters – as the Editor of the Miscellany, and as a frequent Contributor', a double role which enabled him to welcome criticism on the principle that 'where the poison is, there the antidote may be' (*Watchman*, 197). But despite Coleridge's protestations that the *Watchman* was an open forum for a free and frank exchange of views, he ran out of patience with his readers, and the alternative society of the text failed to materialise. Complaining about the conflicting demands upon him, with some readers wanting only political news and debates, and others calling for more poetry and less 'democratic scurrility' (CL I, 202, 195), Coleridge suddenly realised he was no longer the 'figurante of the circle'; indeed, he had been upstaged by his audience, with the average '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' (CL I, 202).

Coleridge's oscillation at this time between egalitarian and hierarchical concepts of the writer–reader compact was paralleled stylistically in the contrast between the *Watchman*'s meek and neutral persona, outlined in Number 1, and Coleridge's highly personal, impassioned and figurative essay style. At a time when choice of style and register were read as indicators of political allegiance – take, for example, the contrast between Tom Paine's plainness and Edmund Burke's ornateness – Coleridge gave off a mixed message. Initially, his sales pitch is for a cool and neutral presentation of facts, relating the political events of the day 'simply and nakedly, without epithets or comments', accompanied by a neutral summary of the different accounts to be found in the opposition and ministerial prints (*Watchman*, 14). Mindful, perhaps, of the recent slur against him as one of a group of 'factious Aliens' scattering 'the seeds of discord and sedition' in Bristol (*Lects.* 1795, 329, 389), Coleridge defiantly announces: 'though I may be classed with a party, I scorn to be of a faction' (*Watchman*, 14). But the cautious and mild tone of this 'Introductory Essay' is followed by an extraordinarily pungent essay on Edmund Burke, full of complexity and profound paradox, and alive with the 'throb and tempest of political fanaticism', the very rhetorical violence which (ironically) Coleridge charges to Burke. To instance just one marvellous sentence: 'At the flames which rise from the altar of Freedom, [Burke] kindled that torch with which he since endeavoured to set fire to her temple' (*Watchman*, 39). Irritated by Coleridge's professed 'spirit of meekness', Caius Gracchus concluded of the essay on Burke: 'Inconsistency in the character of this Philosopher, seems a prominent feature' (*Watchman*, 194–5).

The radical political lecturer John Thelwall was also at this time remonstrating with Coleridge about his inconsistency – the puzzling contradiction between the ‘outrageous violence’ of phrases like ‘th’imbrothell’d Atheist’s heart’ and Coleridge’s supposed Christian meekness (CL 1, 212).

In his essay ‘Modern Patriotism’ in Number III of the *Watchman* Coleridge further alienated radical friends like Thelwall by pitting his own brand of Christian patriotism against a demonised version of radicalism-as-sexual-immorality. Without naming William Godwin, he denounced his philosophical principles, such as the argument against marriage, as ‘vicious’, and his book as a ‘pimp’ and ‘Pandar to Sensuality’ (*Watchman*, 196, 100). As Coleridge increasingly detached himself from the radical movement, Christian quietism and consensus-seeking came to prevail over party and controversy, leading Alan Liu to argue that the ‘origin of the journalism of impartiality lies in apostasy’, with Coleridge as ‘the master amphibian of test-the-water politics’ in the post-*Watchman* years.²⁵ Another way of viewing Coleridge’s political journalism would be to see its various contortions as expressive of a deep-seated psychological and creative attachment to moving forward through resistance, a dialectic he first hints at in a letter of 1800 to Godwin, advising him to give up his theory of ‘Collision of Ideas, & take up that of mutual Propulsions’ (CL 1, 636). The experiment of the *Friend*, as we shall see, involved precisely this, a strategy of moving forward stealthily through a symbiotic dialectic between writer and reader involving active and passive motions, attacking and yielding.

In the tenth and last number of the *Watchman*, Coleridge announced that he would ‘cease to cry the State of the political Atmosphere’, his explanation being simply that ‘the Work does not pay its expences’. The failure to retain subscribers was, however, only a partial explanation. Coleridge had stuck his neck out, and the times were dangerous: James Montgomery, radical editor of the Sheffield *Iris*, was clapped into prison for criminal libel just as Coleridge began his tour for subscribers in January 1796, the orator John Gale Jones was arrested in Birmingham in March, and few radical journals were to survive the year.²⁶ In addition to state-organised terror, the news from France was growing more and more discouraging. Gradually, Coleridge’s highly personalised authorial presence begins to disappear from the paper, and by May he confessed himself ‘depressed . . . beneath the *writing-point* in the thermometer of mind’ (CL 1, 212). The letters trace a steady disengagement from radical commitments: ‘local and temporary Politics are my aversion’, he wrote in July, and by October he has ‘snapped’ his ‘squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition’, piously denouncing ‘politicians and politics – a sort of men and a kind of study . . . highly unfavourable to all Christian graces’ (CL 1, 222, 240).

Renunciation was never Coleridge's strong point. Even the rural retreat of a pantisocratic farm in Wales had to be located 'near some Town, where there is a speedy Communication with London' (CL I, 155). During 1809-10, Coleridge succumbed one more time to the lure of running his own newspaper, subjecting himself again to the dreaded scourge of a weekly deadline. In his sights were two new radical weeklies, William Cobbett's *Political Register* (1802) and Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* (1808). In terms of format, Coleridge insisted that the *Friend* be modelled precisely upon Cobbett's newspaper (CL III, 196-7); at one point he even confessed that the 'paramount Object' of the *Friend* lay in strangling the bad passions awakened by Cobbett's prose (CL III, 141, 143). Few friends believed that Coleridge was capable of carrying on this newspaper, especially one written in Grasmere and published from so remote a place as Penrith, but Coleridge persisted in his plan nevertheless, carrying the Prospectus 'wet from the pen to the printer, without consulting anybody, or giving himself time for consideration',²⁷ and sustaining the periodical for nine months, three times the duration of the *Watchman*. And whereas the *Watchman* was devoted to addressing the politics of the day, the *Friend* (ostensibly) turned its back on politics, 'except as far as they may happen to be involved in some point of private morality' (*Friend* II, 27). Any writing which did not pass the test of holding itself aloof from current affairs went elsewhere, into the venal *Courier*, for instance, which was helping out in other ways too, through advertisements for the *Friend* and credit for stamped paper (EOT I, cxxxii).

The private and personal are hall-marks of the *Friend*, a tactic which was not just temperamentally congenial, as we have seen, but part of a concerted tilt at another new phenomenon in the literary marketplace, the 'synodical individuum' of the *Edinburgh Review* (founded 1802), in which the anonymous writer hid behind the 'disguise of a pretended Board or Association of Critics' (*Friend* II, 108). Not that Coleridge lacked disguises of his own. In order to cover over the 'indelacy' of speaking of himself 'to Strangers and to the Public' (CL III, 151), he presented the *Friend*'s Prospectus as an extract from a private letter, a ruse which enabled him to speak frankly of the experiment he was intending to perpetrate on his readers. For instance, he declared that the format of the weekly essay offered him 'the most likely Means of winning, instead of forcing my Way':

Supposing Truth on my Side, the Shock of the first Day might be so far lessened by Reflections of the succeeding Days, as to procure for my next Week's Essay a less hostile Reception, than it would have met with, had it been only the next Chapter of a present volume. I hoped to disarm the Mind of those Feelings, which preclude Conviction by Contempt, and, as it were, fling the Door in the Face of Reasoning by a *Presumption* of its Absurdity. (*Friend* II, 17)

Progress is to be made through the alternate motions of readerly resistance and yielding, a pattern mirrored in Coleridge's own alternation between authorial attack and accommodation. Such an experimental methodology could only be carried out over time and through the close monitoring of his readers' reactions. So novel was Coleridge's project of weekly attrition against his readers that none of his close friends appeared to understand exactly what he was trying to do. As far as Southey was concerned, Coleridge's desire for intimate friendship with his readers was humbug, involving an 'unmanly *humblefication*' which the ambitiously high pedagogical aim of his paper gave the lie to (Warter II, 120). The other great weakness was his 'rambling and inconclusive' prose style, a function of Coleridge's 'inordinate love of talking' (Warter II, 188), and the oral dictation of whole numbers of the *Friend* which were then printed without re-transcription.²⁸

Unfortunately for Coleridge, his subscribers failed to appreciate his experiment upon them. As far as they were concerned, the solicitude for their comfort came too late, so that what remained uppermost was the assault, succinctly summed up in Coleridge's modelling of the writer-reader relationship on that of the physician and patient. As for the many (and understandable) complaints of 'unintelligibility', these were deflected by the charge that unintelligibility was just as likely to be the fault of the reader as of the writer, especially if the reader had an 'ideotic understanding'. In illustration of this point Coleridge cited the case of one of his subscribers who wrote to abuse him for "learned nonsense and unintelligible Jargon" (*Friend* II, 275). Having fallen into the hands of the dangerously illiterate, Coleridge had come to resemble the physician who absurdly recommended 'exercise with the dumb bells, as the only mode of cure, to a patient paralytic in both arms' (*Friend* II, 152). His ambition to write, not for the 'multitude', but for those who 'by Rank, or Fortune, or official Situation, or Talents and Habits of Reflection, are to *influence* the Multitude' (CL III, 143), had not quite come to pass.

There is a general truth in the claim that the *Friend* marketed itself for a more establishment and professional coterie than the middle-class dissenters and friends of freedom targeted by the *Watchman*.²⁹ But it is important to note that many of the *Friend*'s subscribers were friends and associates from earlier days, and that when the eminently practical Thomas Clarkson offered him a ready-made readership in the shape of dozens of well-off and well-read Quakers, the needy Coleridge was happy to accept their vote of confidence in him. But whilst willing to accept Quaker support, he would not then take direction about how to accommodate their special interests and views, with the result that they dropped their subscriptions, leaving Coleridge incensed by their desertion.³⁰ In a telling phrase about the failure

of his idiosyncratic and intensely personal aspirations to establish a devoted readership, he described the *Friend* as 'a secret entrusted to the Public'.³¹

In *Biographia Literaria* (1817) Coleridge dismissed newspapers as entirely unsuitable reading matter for Christians, full of 'merely political and temporary interest'. He also lampooned his own efforts as a journalist, saying the work was not fit for a learned gentleman like himself, a point reinforced by his distorting reduction of the *Watchman* subscription tour to an encounter with two philistine types – a lower-class, evangelical tallow chandler and an opulent cotton merchant, both of whom refused to subscribe (*BL* 1, 182–4). Any ambition he might have had to be a 'popular writer' foundered on his political independence (he claimed), on opinions 'equi-distant from all the three prominent parties, the Pittites, the Foxites, and the Democrats', with the result that most of his first newspaper ended up in the grate (*BL* 1, 187). Later, Coleridge referred to the *Watchman* as 'an obscure and short-lived periodical publication, which has long since been *used off* as "winding sheets for herrings and pilchards"' (*Watchman*, 139, n. 2).

The *Friend* received better treatment from its author, rising like a phoenix out of its newspaper covers in 1812 as a 'Series of Essays', then again in 1818, when it appeared in thoroughly revised book form. By this time Coleridge's excitement at the speed of newspaper circulation had evaporated into alarm at the size and rapidly changing composition of the reading public, with the consequence that 'circulation' now became an internalised metaphor of bodily integrity. Warning his young readers in *Biographia Literaria* to avoid the trade of authorship, Coleridge argues that thoughts, like other bodily secretions, 'must be taken up again into the circulation, and be again and again re-secreted in order to ensure a healthful vigor, both to the mind and to its intellectual offspring' (*BL* 1, 231). Similarly, the experimental methodology of 'mutual Propulsions', initially devised by Coleridge as an alternative to radicalism and public controversy, became an increasingly internalised metaphor. The small water insect on the surface of a rivulet which '*wins* its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion' is the very 'emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking' (*BL* 1, 124).

NOTES

- 1 Wilfrid Hindle, *The Morning Post, 1772–1937* (London: Routledge, 1937), 85.
- 2 See A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, c. 1780–1850* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1949).
- 3 See Lucy Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press, 1772–1792* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), vi.

- 4 Hindle gives a lively account of the newspaper's rise to eminence in chapter 5 of *The Morning Post*.
- 5 See Young's *Travels in France* (1792), a text quoted by Coleridge in the Prospectus to the *Watchman*. For 'electric sensibility' as the vehicle of a 'universal circulation of intelligence' in Britain, see Young's *Travels*, ed. J. Kaplow (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 160. The contrast between well-informed British labourers and ignorant French provincials is a major focus of Young's text; see also pp. 140-1, 162-3, 171-2, 180.
- 6 Duke of Chandos, 'Debate in the Lords on the African Slave Bill' (1788) in *Parliamentary History of England* (London: T. C. Hansard, 1806-20), xxvii, 648.
- 7 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, 128.
- 8 Coleridge reiterated the claim in 1814; see CL III, 510, 531, and Erdman's commentary in EOT I, clx.
- 9 EOT I, 401-2, n. 12.
- 10 See Thompson's 1979 review of Erdman's edition: 'A Compendium of Cliché: The Poet as Essayist', repr. in E. P. Thompson, *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 143-55.
- 11 E. P. Thompson, *The Romantics*, 153. See William Christie, 'Going Public: Print Lords Byron and Brougham', *Studies in Romanticism*, 38, 3 (Fall 1999), 443-75.
- 12 Quoted by Erdman who thinks that the metaphor might be Hazlitt's (EOT I, clxxiv).
- 13 See Kevin Gilmartin, 'Radical Print Culture in Periodical Form', *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre: Re-forming Literature, 1789-1837*, ed. T. Rajan and J. Wright (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43.
- 14 See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 23.
- 15 See Deirdre Coleman, *Coleridge and 'The Friend' (1809-1810)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
- 16 Peter Kitson aligns Pantisocracy with Unitarianism. See 'The Whore of Babylon and the Woman in White: Coleridge's Radical Unitarian Language', *Coleridge's Visionary Languages: Essays in Honour of John Beer*, ed. T. Fulford and M. D. Paley (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 6.
- 17 Coleridge's essay against the slave trade was published between the debates on Wilberforce's second (unsuccessful) Bill against the trade in the House of Commons; for the boycott campaign and associated Gothicism, see Deirdre Coleman, 'Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s', *English Literary History*, 61 (Summer 1994), 341-62, and Charlotte Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792', *Representations*, 48 (Fall 1994), 48-69.
- 18 Roger Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1763-1803* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1988), 46-50.
- 19 Compare Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (London: J. Johnson, 1793), repr. Lucy Aikin, *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1825), II, 381-412.
- 20 For the importance of advertisements to the success of newspapers, see Hindle, *The Morning Post*, 83-4.

- 21 See the entry for 'taverns and alehouses' in Iain McCalman, ed., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 724-5; and chapter 6 of McCalman's *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 22 Mrs Margaret Sandford, *Thomas Poole and His Friends*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1888), 1, 282.
- 23 See EOT 1, cxxvi.
- 24 A 'spacious coffee-house' is how James Anderson described his new periodical, the *Edinburgh Bee* in 1790; for discussion of the *Bee*, see Klancher, *English Reading Audiences*, 22-6.
- 25 Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 416.
- 26 The *Watchman* followed the case of Jones and his associate John Binns in some detail, since attempts to prosecute them involved the new Gagging Acts. See Thompson, *The Romantics*, 118.
- 27 *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. J. W. Warter, 4 vols. (London: Longmans, 1856) 11, 120. Further references will appear in the text as 'Warter'.
- 28 For Coleridge's method of composition, see Dorothy Wordsworth's letter (MY 1, 391).
- 29 See Klancher, *English Reading Audiences*, 152.
- 30 See BL 1, 175-6; and chapter 5, 'Coleridge's Quaker Subscribers', in Deirdre Coleman, *Coleridge and The Friend*.
- 31 'The "Friend" is a secret which I have entrusted to the public; and, unlike most secrets, it hath been well kept', from Thomas Allsop, ed., *Letters, Conversations and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), 1, 233.

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