

## I

KELVIN EVEREST

## Coleridge's life

Coleridge's life has proved difficult to narrate. Its events are hard to understand as a developmental sequence. Like Coleridge's personality, and like his writings, they disclose numerous facets in loose and disorganised connection. His drive to articulate a philosophy of unity, with its conspicuous successes and sometimes embarrassing failures, has its fundamental context in the great sweep of momentous political and social change in Britain and Europe during the period of his life. The moves from radical to conservative, from necessitarian rationalist to philosophical idealism and Anglican Christianity, were negotiated under external pressures which were, at once, sharply focused for Coleridge personally, and profoundly representative of the spiritual journey of an entire generation. This representative quality gives a particular importance not just to Coleridge's successes, but, perhaps even more so, to his failures and failings.

Coleridge was born on 21 October 1772 in the small town of Ottery St Mary in Devonshire. He was the youngest of ten children. His own memories of childhood recall a powerful sense of sibling rivalry; as a small boy he felt threatened by the competition of older and bigger children. This vulnerability was shielded in the character of an infant prodigy, gifted with special powers of articulation, and nourished by an astonishing capacity and appetite for reading. He claimed to have read the Bible by the age of three. He kept the company of adults, content to parade his precocity and to be paraded, always treated as a special case, self-consciously extraordinary, in every way more alive than others to the pleasures and the threats of a difficult world.

This sensitive temperament was subjected to powerful shocks following the sudden death of his father in October 1781, when Coleridge was still only eight years old. He was clearly much closer to his father, an educated vicar who wrote books, than to his mother. The shock of his father's death was the more acute for being associated in Coleridge's mind with the claims of another brother; his father had died on returning from a trip to Plymouth to deliver Coleridge's brother Frank to the navy as a midshipman, a journey

itself expressive of Mrs Coleridge's ambition for her children. Soon afterwards, Coleridge was sent, through the offices of a family friend, to attend school at Christ's Hospital in London, and found himself suddenly quite abandoned and alone in the harsh regime of a boarding school in the great city, far from his country home. He arrived in September 1782. Family connections in London at first took him in, and he again found himself paraded as a prodigy. But these acquaintances fell away, and he embarked in lonely solitude on a school career which began without distinction, in the dull and comfortless routines of the school. This trial had its consolations, in the form of enduring friendships with school contemporaries such as Charles Lamb. After a slow start Coleridge's intellectual talents were recognised, and nurtured, notably by the schoolmaster James Boyer, vividly recalled years later in *Biographia Literaria* as a harsh and unforgiving presence, who yet instilled in Coleridge an understanding of the attentive discipline necessary to the writing, and reading, of poetry.

In the years at Christ's Hospital Coleridge's inner imaginative life took on a bookish intensity which deepened in contrast with the cold banality of his school experience. The voracious reading broadened to include contemporary poetry such as the popular sonnets of William Bowles, and also philosophy and theology. These topics became central to Coleridge's intellectual development; but, significantly, his interest was from the start not controlled and assimilative, but bewildering and disorientated.

Towards the end of his career at Christ's Hospital Coleridge was elected a 'Grecian', a recognition of his academic ability which marked him out for university. Before duly matriculating at Jesus College, Cambridge, in October 1791 Coleridge had met and become friendly with the Evans family, with whose daughter Mary he formed a shy but strong attachment. This inaugurated a long and messily unsuccessful history of relationships with women, which provides a constant jarring counterpoint to the larger pattern of Coleridge's repeated failures and frustrations in adult life. In Cambridge Coleridge kept up Christ's Hospital friendships, and quickly made new and interesting contacts. His undergraduate career at first showed high promise. He attended meetings of a literary discussion group run by Christopher Wordsworth, came to know interesting undergraduate contemporaries including Porson and Wrangham, and in 1792 he won the Browne medal for a 'Greek Sapphic Ode' on the slave trade. But this sign of political engagement also confirmed the emergence of a further significant dimension in Coleridge's experience, as he found himself caught up in the great social upheaval of the French Revolution, and its momentous transforming impact on Britain and Europe. He followed events and arguments with keen attention. Coleridge's instincts within the turmoil of this pervasive international

crisis were, like so many of his generation, to favour the radical cause. Events in France appeared at first very much in keeping with native British radical traditions, and the sense of a dawning new age of freedom and equality was widespread, particularly amongst the educated young. Coleridge's radical affiliation found a local Cambridge context in the cause of William Frend, a don who was tried in 1793 for publishing a pamphlet which attacked the liturgy of the Church in radical terms. Coleridge attended the trial and applauded so enthusiastically in Frend's support that he himself began to attract the attention of the authorities. Frend was banned from the university. As the course of events in France turned sinister and bloody, and more particularly after the execution of Louis XVI, and the declaration of war by France on Britain early in 1793, Coleridge felt the new pressure of a youthful enthusiasm for the political ideals of 'Liberty'. Support for France was now potentially treason, and as the forces of reaction gathered so Coleridge found that his beliefs and ideas needed careful expression, and a guarded sense of audience. This consciousness of a threatening social and political community now gave external form to the inner demons and insecurities already at work in Coleridge's experience. His life began to lurch vertiginously into a chaos of sudden irrational decisions and unpredictable changes of direction and heart. Too shy to make progress with Mary Evans, he fell into a damaging routine of loose living, prostitutes and debt, lost his way at university, and in December bizarrely chose to enlist in the 15th Light Dragoons as a trooper under the stagey name 'Silas Tomkyn Comberbache'. He did not try hard for anonymity, and was soon rescued. But the episode sounds an ominous note in Coleridge's biography: regular collapse into craven dependency and transparent untruth was to become its only predictable constant.

Coleridge's early radicalism exposed him to all the forces of a society in severe crisis, as the long-building tensions inherent in agrarian and industrial revolution, with their emergent formations of social class, were brought suddenly to focus in the charged political atmosphere of the 1790s. His intelligence and depth of reading in the complexities of the situation, coupled with his ambition to play some part on the public stage, as an intellectual on the side of progress, meant that these great tensions in British society were played out with profoundly unsettling immediacy in his own career. But he was equally interested in the vexed relation between his consciousness and the unconscious drives and activity of the mind. The dual pressures he was subject to in these contexts make for the tormented shapelessness of his maturity, and are representative of underlying contradictions in the social experience of his class and generation.

The duality is tellingly imaged in a famous passage from the twelfth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge apologises for the abstraction and

difficulty of his philosophical exposition by affirming that philosophy is simply not a discourse equally available, accessible and interesting to all men. He then introduces a metaphor to illustrate the different orders of knowledge and understanding which may be brought to bear in the attempt to understand our experience:

The first range of hills, that encircle the scanty vale of human life, is the horizon for the majority of its inhabitants. On *its* ridges the common sun is born and departs. From *them* the stars rise, and touching *them* they vanish. By the many, even this range, the natural limit and bulwark of the vale, is but imperfectly known. Its higher ascents are too often hidden by mists and clouds from uncultivated swamps, which few have courage or curiosity to penetrate. To the multitude below these vapors appear, now as the dark haunts of terrific agents, on which none may intrude with impunity; and now all *a-glow*, with colors not their own, they are gazed at, as the splendid palaces of happiness and power. But in all ages there have been a few, who measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls have learnt, that the sources must be far higher and far inward; a few, who even in the level streams have detected elements, which neither the vale itself or the surrounding mountains contained or could supply. (BL, I, 239)

The image gives very powerfully what was to become Coleridge's chief characteristic as a thinker, his constant effort to see the timeless, permanent dimensions in local and transiently immediate experience. But the image in *Biographia* is strangely ambivalent, for this metaphor also suggests the far extent of external causes in local events, thus evoking the transformations in ordinary social life brought about by vast cultural and political upheavals. And there is the further contrasting implication that there are deep and obscure psychological determinates of consciousness and personality, largely unexplored and indeed hardly imagined by most people. This doubleness is embodied in Coleridge's life and work. He lives out the contradictions of his social position as a radical intellectual of the middle class in the momentous context of the years in Britain which followed the French Revolution. His reactions to the stresses of this situation, including a move to the right in politics, and towards orthodoxy in religion, typify the intellectual destiny of an entire generation. But his struggle with the differently intractable problems of his own psychology, and more particularly his extraordinary effort to confront, interrogate and document that struggle in his writings, at once gives an internalised intensity to the social contradictions, and anticipates the intellectual arena of modernity.

After his rescue from the Dragoons, Coleridge returned briefly to Cambridge but soon embarked with his friend Joseph Hucks on a tour to Wales. They stopped *en route* in Oxford, and Coleridge met Robert Southey in June 1794.

The two fell immediately into an intimate friendship born of shared interests in radical politics and literature. Their excited discussions led quickly to 'Pantisocracy', an idealistic scheme to establish an egalitarian community on the banks of the Susquehanna river in Pennsylvania. The Welsh tour preceded and Coleridge was taken aback by a chance meeting in Wrexham with Mary Evans, the more so since his enthusiastic dreams of a radical community with Southey had quickly come to include the presence of the Fricker family; Southey was already engaged to Edith Fricker, and Coleridge had become entangled in an attachment to her sister Sara. Under Southey's watchful eye this solidified into an engagement by the autumn. The connection with Southey drew Coleridge to Bristol, and by the end of 1794 he had given up his Cambridge career and taken lodgings with Southey and another pantisocrat, George Burnett. He had made a start on his first serious long poem, 'Religious Musings', but now his energies were mainly devoted to developing a career as a radical lecturer, and public lectures followed, on politics, revealed religion and the slave trade. Coleridge fell out with Southey in the summer of 1795, and pantisocracy was abandoned; but its legacy was to prove disastrous in Coleridge's private life, for after a period of guilty absence in London he acceded to Southey's ominously self-righteous pressure and returned to the West Country to marry Sara Fricker in October.

Following his marriage Coleridge began to publish his political lectures, and he formed a plan to produce a journal, the *Watchman*, which would take his independent radical commentary to a wider audience. A tour to the Midlands to attract subscribers brought him into contact with leading intellectual radicals, and confirmed his growing status as an outspoken young critic of the government and supporter of 'Liberty'. The *Watchman* began to appear in March 1796, and ran for ten numbers, appearing every eighth day to avoid the stamp duty that was payable on weekly publications. April saw the publication of a volume of verse, *Poems on Various Subjects*. These publications began to shape the public image of Coleridge as a fiercely principled intellectual whose disinterested views rested on the authority of an immense range of reading in philosophy, theology and political theory. But he was feeling the pressure of local hostility from reactionary opinion, which in slave-trading Bristol was formidable. His domestic situation was also closing in, with the birth of his son Hartley in September 1796, and mounting pressures to find somewhere to live, and something to live on. He was also coming under a new influence, that of William Wordsworth, whom he had first met in Bristol in 1795. Towards the end of 1796 this friendship rapidly deepened and the two young writers, together with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy, became very close. Acting perhaps on the example of their simple style of life, Coleridge made arrangements through his friend Thomas

Poole to move to a small cottage in the market town of Nether Stowey in Somerset, and was installed with his family by the end of the year. He now spent a great deal of time with the Wordsworths, and after a series of mutual visits they moved in to Alfoxden, a house in the Quantock Hills close to Nether Stowey.

Under Wordsworth's influence Coleridge's abstract intellectual interests were joined with a truly remarkable transformation of his talents as a poet. In the mainly quiet retirement of their life in the Quantocks the two poets exchanged ideas and practice, often in the course of long country walks. Wordsworth had already written a substantial body of verse by the time of his friendship with Coleridge, and it is obvious that his confident sense of vocation, and his powerful understanding of his own place in the historical development of English poetry, made a profound impression. But it is equally true to say that the influence of Coleridge was the catalysing agent which confirmed Wordsworth's greatness, bringing an awareness of the need for critical principles, and a new and greatly heightened understanding of the possibilities of a plain and understated style in lyric and blank verse writing. The poetry that Coleridge himself produced in the period of his intimacy with the Wordsworths in Nether Stowey constitutes perhaps his least disputable claim to greatness. The 'Conversation' poems were mainly written at this time, as were 'The Ancient Mariner', conceived as Coleridge's principal contribution to the collaborative *Lyrical Ballads*, and also both 'Kubla Khan', and the first part of 'Christabel'.

But this creative and comparatively settled period in Coleridge's life had its tensions. As the long crisis of the French was deepened with Napoleon's rise to power and Britain's isolation from Europe, so the radical character of Coleridge's public image attracted more hostility, and also covert attention from government agents. Coleridge's friend John Thelwall was discouraged from moving to the area because of his political affiliations. Coleridge and Wordsworth were spied on, with official reports travelling back to government. Coleridge later made a joke of this, but the danger must have seemed real at the time. More personally, Coleridge was beginning to appreciate the powers of laudanum, the alcoholic tincture of opium. His young family grew with the birth of a second son in May 1798. Coleridge had named his first son 'Hartley' after the associationist philosopher who influenced his early determinist position. He now named his new son 'Berkeley' after the idealist philosopher, a choice which marks both the extent of his daily immersion in the abstract life of the mind, and the changing character of his intellectual position. An early rational materialism had led him towards Unitarianism in religion, but now he found the influence of idealist thinkers increasingly arresting, and unsettling, particularly as his quest for gainful

employment was driving him to consider a post as a Unitarian lay preacher in Shrewsbury.

During a visit to Shrewsbury to demonstrate his abilities to the prospective congregation, Coleridge was unexpectedly offered an annuity of £150 by the young industrialist Tom Wedgwood; his instant decision to accept the annuity is memorably recorded in Hazlitt's essay 'My First Acquaintance with Poets'. Hazlitt had walked ten miles from his home in Wem to hear Coleridge, and was completely entranced by the eloquence and erudition of Coleridge's talk, although over the years his initial devoted admiration would turn to bitter and vitriolic disenchantment. The annuity meant that Coleridge was suddenly at liberty to pursue his philosophical interests, and he found himself drawn to study in Germany, at that time the centre of European intellectual life. The Wordsworths' lease was up, and they decided to join him on a trip to learn German and study its contemporary literature and philosophy. In September 1798, almost on the day that *Lyrical Ballads* was published, they sailed for Hamburg. Coleridge left his family behind.

The party called on the poet Klopstock, then split up, with the Wordsworths travelling south to Goslar, while Coleridge first studied German in Ratzeburg and then moved on to Göttingen. Here he encountered the major currents of German intellectual life. These embraced contemporary literature and literary history, the philosophy of Kant and his followers, the Spinozists, Eichorn's biblical criticism, and the latest speculations on the relation of mind and body, and questions concerning the definition of 'life' raised by developments in scientific medicine. Coleridge had already encountered something of these interests, variously mediated, through his Bristol circle, but his studies in Germany gave him an almost unique knowledge of the latest developments in European thought. This was to prove a mixed blessing. In the following years, as Coleridge became the most important and influential agent for the dissemination of German Romantic philosophy in England, he often found it difficult to maintain a clear distinction between exposition and plagiarism.

In February 1799 Coleridge's baby son Berkeley died. Coleridge did not get the news until April, but he nevertheless continued his stay in Germany, not finally arriving back in Nether Stowey until the end of July. This can hardly have helped relations with his wife, and the subsequent breakdown of the marriage perhaps has its origins in this selfish irresponsibility. But other forces were now at work to undermine any stability in Coleridge's life. The Wordsworths did not return to the West Country from Germany, but decided to settle in their native Northern England. Other important Bristol connections such as Humphrey Davy were gravitating towards London. West Country projects were soon laid aside as Coleridge began an essentially

wandering existence which characterised his middle years. He joined Wordsworth and his brother John in October 1799 for a walking tour of the Lake District, and in the course of this visit met and fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, a childhood friend of the Wordsworths whose sister Mary was to become Wordsworth's wife. Coleridge's love for Sara Hutchinson became a constant distraction and unhappiness, an abiding obsession. It confirmed the blighting failure of his marriage whilst doing nothing to free him from its frustrations.

Coleridge travelled back to London and found work as a political journalist with the *Morning Post*, where his breadth of knowledge and grasp of the underlying issues in local events were well suited to the role of commentator on current affairs. The course of events in France, in subtle combination with the prevailing political climate in England, pushed Coleridge towards a patriotic anti-Napoleonic stance. The discomforts of this growth away from his earlier very public radicalism were intensified when he emerged as the target of satirical attack by the conservative *Anti-Jacobin* for the radicalism he was fast discarding. This kind of public contradiction was particularly awkward for Coleridge, who always felt uneasy in the presence of what he considered a hostile audience, and who thus increasingly found himself obliged to provide retrospective explanations for an earlier self whose commitments and loyalties he wished to disavow. Lacking the confidence and self-belief simply to articulate changed opinions, he came to rely on his eloquence to present his own development as internally consistent, but at a level of complexity which left most observers perplexed, if not sceptical. This tortured compulsion to revise his past in accordance with present imperatives was made the worse by its connection with Coleridge's increasingly relentless self-psychologising, particularly in his notebooks, which courageously pursued his nightmares and neuroses deeper and deeper into the sub-conscious. In the absence of a secure family, or any viable alternative in the always out-of-reach Sara Hutchinson, the attraction of laudanum, not to mention alcohol, grew stronger and stronger.

After a few busy months in London, Coleridge visited the Wordsworths at their new home in Grasmere, and in July 1800 he moved his own family to Greta Hall in Keswick. His plan was to emulate a Wordsworthian project of lofty commentary from the distance of a country retirement. But he found increasingly that he could not sustain such productivity. Although he continued his metaphysical studies, and managed some translations from the German, he was now publishing very little. The poetic gift that had blossomed so marvellously at Nether Stowey in 1797–8 now appeared virtually to desert him, although a long and anguished verse-letter to Sara Hutchinson was edited down, depersonalised, and published as the 'Dejection Ode' on

4 October 1802, Wordsworth's wedding-day. His family life was deteriorating, and his laudanum habit began to get very much more serious. In due course Southey and his family moved in to Greta Hall, and Southey effectively took over full responsibility for Coleridge's family, which now included his daughter, Sara, born in December 1802. Coleridge absented himself in the summer of 1803 on a tour of Scotland with the Wordsworths, but with failing health and increasingly serious dependency on opium a more absolute break was inevitable. He chose to seek a better climate in Malta.

Malta was an important naval base, at a difficult time for Britain in the war with France, so Coleridge's decision to go there was itself a kind of patriotic affirmation. Once arrived, he managed surprisingly well. The High Commissioner, Sir Alexander Ball, was impressed by Coleridge's abilities and conversational powers, and quickly developed a role for him in the administration of the island. Coleridge was able to travel, and to think through the intellectual progress he had now completed towards a Trinitarian orthodoxy in religion. His stay in Malta ended with news of the death of John Wordsworth in a shipwreck, but his return involved a protracted overland journey through a Napoleonic Italy that had real dangers for Coleridge, following his widely noticed attacks on Napoleon in the *Morning Post*. He finally arrived back in England in August 1806, after meetings in Rome with the poet Tieck and the American painter Washington Allston, amongst others.

Coleridge could not face returning to his family in the Lakes, and after a period of indeterminate wandering he settled briefly in London and worked as a journalist for the *Courier*. His articles on the war saw his position becoming not simply conservative but emphatically pro-government, alienating some amongst the dwindling band of his admirers. Coleridge also made arrangements to give lecture courses in London. These came to fruition in the autumn of 1807. They were hampered early on by Coleridge's increasing unreliability, but once he began to trust his own improvised fluency in performance then lecturing became a principal vehicle for his developing public personality. The marvellous talk could flow uninterrupted, finding its own shape, and unchecked by such niceties of print publication as documented sources or sustained argumentative coherence.

Relations with his wife deteriorated badly in the period following Coleridge's return from Malta. He avoided contact, although there were visits north to the Wordsworths, who were appalled by his changed appearance and troubled by his drinking and dependency on laudanum and the erratic behaviour which went with them. There was a strange crisis in his relations with Wordsworth when in December 1806 Coleridge apparently hallucinated that he had witnessed an explicit sexual encounter between Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson.

An increasingly tortured mental life, savagely lucid in guilty and unflinching self-analysis, was now often joined with physical illness. He found comfort in the family of a Bristol friend, John Morgan, whose support became important in the dark middle years of his life. By the summer of 1807 he again gravitated north to the Wordsworths, this time with the intention of pulling his career round with the production of a journal, the *Friend*, which against all odds he succeeded in producing, mainly single-handed, over twenty-eight issues up to March 1810. The *Friend* is a quintessentially Coleridgean production. It is a philosophical journal committed to thinking through the basic principles and abstract issues which underlie ordinary experience and the commotion of social and political life. As such it embodies all that is most admirable in Coleridge's undaunted determination always to try to understand things in terms of absolute philosophical questions of origin and ultimate destination, and to identify and tease out traces of the transcendent in the everyday. But the *Friend* is also wilfully obscure, bitterly disorganised, eclectically derivative and compulsively devious in its constant rhetorical manoeuvring to justify its own hurried incompleteness. And yet in spite of these formidable obstacles to success it found readers, and admirers, and certainly contributed through its successive revised editions to the development of English intellectual conservatism through the nineteenth century.

Once the *Friend* had been finally abandoned, Coleridge entered upon a period of depression, illness and addiction which brought him close to suicide. Sara Hutchinson effected a decisive break. He quarrelled disastrously with Wordsworth, after a mutual friend unguardedly reported some mortifyingly disparaging remarks made by Wordsworth in private about him. He found himself in London, keeping up appearances for old friends such as Lamb, but more and more reliant on the support of others. Morgan looked after him for a while. He turned again to lecturing, this time attracting a fashionable literary audience. But these lectures were very markedly dependent at times on recently published German work, notably by Schlegel, and, from this time on, the shadow of plagiarism is often seriously problematic in Coleridge's published writings. In 1812 he visited the Lakes for the last time, to arrange for a revised edition of the *Friend*. He did not call on Wordsworth, but a meeting did follow soon afterwards in London, and led finally to a reconciliation of sorts. Now and then Coleridge still proved capable of literary exertion. He produced occasional journalism, continued with his lecturing, and managed a revision of his drama *Osorio*, first written in 1797 in Nether Stowey but now successfully produced at Drury Lane in January 1813 as *Remorse*. But these encouragements were overwhelmed by a brooding sense of personal failure, an inability to discipline himself to the production of



work on a scale which could properly articulate the undoubted power and extraordinary breadth of his intellect and talents. Wedgwood's annuity was withdrawn. His great support John Morgan was bankrupt and himself in need of support. Coleridge did his best to help, and spent a period in Wiltshire with the family. But towards the end of 1813 he fell into a state of total collapse while staying at an inn near Bath, able to do little more for months on end than contemplate what he felt to be the wreck of his life and ambitions.

His efforts with the *Friend*, however, and his lectures in London, together with the success of *Remorse*, had kept his reputation alive. Coleridge's notorious lack of will power and self-destructiveness were always bafflingly joined with a surprising resilience, and in the summer of 1814, at the age of forty-one, he began a painful but nonetheless startlingly energetic resurgence in his literary career. He was now more or less alienated from his contemporaries Wordsworth and Southey, and had disappointed the expectations of many who had known him as a brilliant young poet and lecturer in the 1790s. But a new generation had grown up, admiring Coleridge's published poetry and also those works, such as 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel', known only by recitation and private circulation in literary London. This generation included Shelley, Keats, and Byron, who did much to assist Coleridge in the period leading up to his exile in 1816.

By the beginning of 1815 Coleridge was living with the Morgans at Calne in Wiltshire, and here he began to think of bringing out a collection of his poetry. This led him to recall Wordsworth's autobiographical poem (the future *Prelude*), which was referred to during Wordsworth's life as 'The Poem to Coleridge', and to begin to develop a critical account of Wordsworth's poetic practice which soon broadened to encompass his own principles, practice and development as a poet, by way of forming a kind of critical preface to his collected verse. The project quickly grew far beyond the limits of a preface, however, particularly under the impetus achieved by Coleridge's new method of composition by dictation to John Morgan, which clearly suited him well. Given Coleridge's insistence as a thinker on reaching always for the longest perspective, and the most fundamental principles at play in an argument, discussion of his poetic practice drew him into a major exploration, not just of his personal development, but of the context of his work in English literary history, including the relationship with Wordsworth. This led in turn to philosophy, and theories of language, and in short to the *Biographia Literaria*, a kind of intellectual autobiography unparalleled in its combination of important literary criticism, brilliant local insight and chaotic disorganisation. Significant stretches of the theoretical musings in *Biographia* are more or less dishonestly plagiarised, but the whole manner of the book is so extreme

in vulnerable insecurity, and so apologetic in failing to deliver the grandiose philosophical syntheses it constantly promises, that plagiarism seems beside the point. It is the wholly unique expression of a brilliant but self-consciously flawed and neurotic mind, desperate for the sympathetic ear of an audience whose judgement it dreads.

During the period of its composition Coleridge also made progress with other projects. In 1816 he wrote a new play, or rather 'dramatic entertainment', *Zapolya*, which was eventually produced in 1818. He at last published 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel' in a pamphlet with 'The Pains of Sleep'. *The Statesman's Manual*, first of his so-called *Lay Sermons*, appeared in December 1816. This work continued Coleridge's commitment to assist the intellectual life of his generation by teaching them to set contemporary events in the context of general issues of political and ultimately religious principle. Like all of Coleridge's mature published prose works, its ungainly stylistic obscurity failed to deter some readers, and the commitment to see the larger picture won influence and admirers. Its conservatism enraged Hazlitt, who launched a tremendous attack on Coleridge's apostasy in a review for the *Edinburgh*.

In April 1816 Coleridge presented himself at the Highgate house of the surgeon James Gillman, in search of treatment for his opium addiction. This turned out to be a decisive moment, for Coleridge moved in with the household, and found the arrangement so congenial that it was continued for the rest of his life. Coleridge's intellectual breadth and learning, and his extraordinary talk, found an enthusiastic admirer in Gillman, while the constant support and sympathetic care of the Gillmans provided Coleridge with an environment in which he could work, and be happy. He became 'the Sage of Highgate', exerting an influence on his own and younger generations mainly through the direct experience of his presence and monologous conversation. He attracted distinguished visitors such as Carlyle, Rossetti, Fenimore Cooper, and many others, and built a circle of disciples over the years which included Joseph Henry Green, Thomas Allsop, and his nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge. These latter two gradually assumed responsibility for recording Coleridge's talk, which was written up and published after his death as *Table Talk*, thus initiating a process by which Coleridge's posthumous fame came to rest on far more than the work actually completed and published in his lifetime. This process adds a further unique dimension to Coleridge's stature, for in his notebooks, marginalia and letters he left a record of speculative intellectual inquiry, and highly innovative self-analysis, which far surpasses in range, originality and sheer bulk the conventional output of any contemporary. The sense of a great genius left unfulfilled by the completed great work, which was so strong a component of his contemporary

image, has been controverted for subsequent generations by the retrieving efforts of scholarship. The great late-twentieth-century scholarly editions of the *Collected Works*, and above all the *Notebooks*, under the commanding management of Kathleen Coburn, have thus created a Coleridge who could not be known in his lifetime.

Coleridge's collected poems appeared in 1817 as *Sibylline Leaves*, together with the *Biographia Literaria*, which had grown to two volumes. They confirmed his new status as a presence in literary London, a suddenly senior and much more substantial figure than the years of wandering after his departure for Germany in 1798 had seemed to anticipate. The dependency of his personality had found shelter with the Gillmans, and the twists and turns of his political allegiances and religious beliefs had settled to an orthodoxy whose justifications and history were buried in the intractable obscurity and formal irresolution of his public writings. A second *Lay Sermon* was published in 1817, addressed to 'the Higher and Middle Classes', which further developed his insistence on the need for ultimately religious principles in the negotiation of local political and social crisis. His acquaintance and celebrity widened. He returned to lecturing, with courses from 1818 on the history of philosophy, and on Shakespeare. Like his table talk, these lectures were recorded by others and came to be published. Their reliance on German and other sources is clear enough, but the extent and frankness of their derivative character is perplexingly debatable, the more so because of their unusual transmission. But their influence, and the influence of certain passages in the *Friend*, the *Lay Sermons*, and above all in *Biographia Literaria* (the discussions of Wordsworth's poetic practice and principles, and the climactic 'definition' of Fancy and Imagination in Chapter Thirteen), was undoubtedly important, and became central in the developing traditions of Anglo-American literary criticism especially after their emergence as academic disciplines in the early years of the twentieth century.

The importance that Coleridge came to have for academic literary criticism is instructive. The discipline that his own critical practice demands of poetry certainly anticipates English 'practical criticism' and the New Criticism. On the other hand his readiness to move from literary to philosophical discourse, and his general project to theorise from particulars, anticipates what might be considered a contrary strain of abstraction and theorising in English studies. Even the incompleteness and tangled rhetorical manoeuvrings of his writings have a kind of appropriateness here, foreshadowing a deep and general problem of identity in academic English, shot through with political and ethical concerns in virtue of its attention to literature, and yet neither sufficiently abstract to contribute in the disciplines of formal thinking, nor comfortable with the mere formalism of aesthetic appreciation. Coleridge

has a curious quality of anticipating problems which only emerge fully in the experience and problems of later generations. There is even a kind of post-modernity in the refusal of the life, or the work, to settle into coherent narrative or any satisfying sense of consummated intention.

Coleridge's later years produced further writings. A long-cherished volume inspired by Archbishop Leighton, whose work had been a comfort in the darkest days of his addiction and illness, at last appeared as *Aids to Reflection* in 1825. This impressed many Anglicans and also found admirers in the United States. He continued to write poetry, and this later verse, almost always occasional, and mostly light and unpretentious in form, nevertheless sometimes manages an unusual bleak and wintry honesty in self-appraisal. In 1828 his *Poetical Works* were published in three volumes, followed by two further editions in his lifetime. His poetry was also published by Galignani in Paris in 1829 as part of *Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats*, confirming his association with, and significance for, the major second-generation Romantics. A final important prose work, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, appeared in 1829. This surprisingly cogent work, prompted by contemporary arguments over Catholic emancipation and the proper place and purpose of the Church, confirmed Coleridge's stature as an influential conservative Anglican thinker.

In 1822 Coleridge's wife, and his daughter Sara, had visited Highgate, and Coleridge was impressed and enchanted by Sara's beauty and formidable learning. She was to fall in love with Henry Nelson Coleridge, whom she thereafter joined in the self-imposed task of preserving her father's work and talk for posterity. Less comforting was the fate of Coleridge's eldest son Hartley. Coleridge was immensely proud of his eccentric son, and delighted when in 1819 he was elected to a Fellowship at Oriel College Oxford. But in little more than a year Hartley was removed from his Fellowship for a record of dissipation and reckless disregard of the College culture. Coleridge was completely devastated, doubtless in part because his son's behaviour appeared a cruel visitation of the father's sins. He tried everything to secure Hartley's re-instatement, but failed. Subsequently a complete separation was effected by the strange and lonely Hartley, who had no contact with his father for the remainder of his life. It was a culminating expression of Coleridge's failure as a father.

By the early 1830s Coleridge had reached something like eminence. His addiction continued, secretive and controlled. He made little money from his writing, his publisher having failed in 1819, and the sympathetic charity of the Gillmans was supplemented by small gifts and annuities, including one from the Royal Society of Literature. There were occasional meetings with

Coleridge's life

the Wordsworths. In 1830 Sara and Henry Nelson Coleridge moved nearby to Hampstead, and supported him through the last few years. Coleridge died on 25 July 1834 in Highgate. A post mortem revealed evidence of serious and long-standing heart problems, suggesting a physiological basis for the laudanum dependency which had so destructively blighted Coleridge's vulnerable sensibility.