

## Introduction

... and we have born  
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
William Cowper, *The Task*, Book I, 'The Sofa'

This book begins with walking, thinking about walking, walking as thinking, just walking. In part a response to what I perceived to be the incompleteness of Romantic accounts of aesthetic experience and pleasure, it began by considering decidedly un-Romantic walking: huddling in Edinburgh doorways to avoid creditors, attempting to hold panic at bay while recognizing you're lost in the dark in dangerous terrain, suddenly recognizing that you've chosen the 'wrong' side of Scafell to descend and may die, feeling untethered by the experience of moving house, of 'flitting'. Such experiences put pressure on ideas of aesthetic pleasure: are they pre-aesthetic, awaiting some Burkean 'safe place' in which to be recuperated, or are they simply unorganized, or even unorganizable – verging on what Burke calls the 'simply terrible'? I began this project looking for the former, hoping to deploy what I was calling experiential criticism to assemble a series of fraught events, represented in a variety of genres, which escaped the recuperative logic of received aesthetic categories. As my epigraph from Cowper suggests, we bear the force of physical events without necessarily registering them; the 'ruffling wind' influences us despite its ephemeral quality. Unable to philosophically slot such (often quotidian) experiences, how should we understand their undeniable power? These events are fugitive on several grounds: walking per se destabilizes our ability to constitute a stable point (a prospect) from which to constitute a self (the pleasure of apparent mastery at the heart of the picturesque); the events are often registered in bodily terms outside language, which I'll call 'somatic events'; and the events are subject to time and the vagaries of memory, as the authors attempt to recover some of their immediacy, even as they slip ever more firmly into the past. This final issue of temporality is made more complex by differences in temporal

scale: Coleridge's immediate past in 'This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison': 'that walnut-tree / Was richly tinged' to the forty-year interval between event and reminiscence in Cottle's *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey*. What can be recovered in such writing? Is there a limit to what can be achieved through memory and prolepsis?

To begin, I calculated that I could not uncover the textural detail of this kind of writing without analogous experience. The failure to successfully represent the confusion, panic, unaccountable sadness or other emotional tangles bound up in a specific walk, the things that draw me to these texts, are simply too complex to recover. To mitigate this problem, I walked in support of my more conventional archival research. This experiential research, as I styled it, provided analogous events that I could confront in their unorganized richness. I made no attempt to retrace the footsteps of the authors in any exacting way, but instead staged my own walks in the environs of the originals in the full knowledge that I was doing something different, not repeating the past. Rather, the uniqueness of events is the point, their essential unrepeatability. For example, I began in Edinburgh tracking De Quincey's routes from the safety of his rooms in the debtor's sanctuary to the Blackwood's offices, to his various safe houses in the city. In doing so, I was not in fear of detection and capture by an Edinburgh 'catchpole', nor could De Quincey have imagined negotiating the traffic to cross Princes Street. So while necessary, in the sense that without analogous experiences I wouldn't actually know what I was talking about, these walks have not found their way into the body of the book, and are instead confined to the *Preface*. Although the book could not have been written without them, these walks are not its subject.

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The book then is divided into four chapters organized around a walk or walks in a variety of sites, from standard picturesque beauty spots like the Wye Valley to darkened doorways in Edinburgh. In addition to the walks, mobility, circulation, aesthetic experience and pleasure, somatic events, and writing in various forms as negotiations of these experiences form the bases of the study. Walking and mobility reveal themselves as both lived events and in figural terms, although as writing they are all in some sense figural. Chapter 1 exemplifies these interests. 'Joseph Cottle, Reminiscence, and the Forms of Circulation' begins with a walk in 1795 from Bristol to Tintern. Cottle's walking companions were Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey and their soon-to-be wives Sara and

Edith Fricker. Cottle was lame and had to hire a horse in Chepstow. The party's experiences of the Piercefield estate, the ruined Abbey and the iron works in the Angiddy Valley after midnight provide a wonderfully skewed version of the picturesque tour as it was riven by interpersonal rancour, poor planning and aesthetic surprise. It also comes to us over a long interval in time as Cottle retrieves it from memory as 'reminiscence'. The first edition of Cottle's book, which includes the story, used 'recollections' in its title. When he revises and republishes following Southey's death, Cottle attempts to work out the difference in considering memory as a tool for simply 'collecting' moments from the past, or as an inevitable intermixture of recollection and authorial desire as he brings his friends back from the dead. Complex social desire punctuates Cottle's career in Bristol as he imagines the city as a crucible for change, and as the centre of artistic experimentation. His dedication to fostering an intellectual and artistic milieu finds expression in an isolated object, the 'Cottle Album'. Cottle's presence in Bristol seems paradoxical at first: he was doubtless at the centre of dissenting and artistic networks in the city as a radical Baptist, bookseller, poet and publisher, yet his role was primarily as the facilitator of creative activity in the city he loved. That activity coalesces in the materiality of the album he kept in the upstairs room of his Corn Street bookshop. The room served as a writing centre, both literally as the place where his friends wrote (Coleridge wrote and revised parts of his first two volumes there) and as a meeting place for writers. Circulation through the room is recorded and authorial exchange made manifest in the first thirteen sheets of the book where his writer friends inscribed fair copies of their recent work: the first entry is a Southey poem, the second one by William 'Hurricane' Gilbert, and so on including works by Charles Lloyd, Robert Lovell, Cottle's brother Amos, et cetera. What remains is an account of circulation, both in the sense of the physical movement of writers through the room and as a site of dissemination, through this rich artistic node of Cottle's design and making. That the album is now held in the rare book collection at Cornell University doesn't diminish its aura as it continues to speak of something precious, something collectible, a record of movement that, as movement, would otherwise collapse into an uncollectible past. Cottle intends his collection to spur recollection – a projection into the past to bring forward that vivid milieu otherwise lost in time. Such complex mementoes typify Cottle's mind and project; he wishes to be a passive centre creating art as a catalyst for others. His activities come under the broad heading of friendship, and his lifelong friendship with Southey provides an excellent instance of his desire for

connection over time and distance. A recurrent feature of their long correspondence was Cottle's annual detailed plans for his visit to Southey in the Lake District. None of these tours actually occurred. Cottle had become too infirm to undertake the journey, and his imagining the aesthetic and emotional riches of such visits had to remain just that – imaginings. The element of play in the letters evinces a buoyancy that readers can only admire; Southey was not asked for his sympathy, but rather for his collaboration in creating the fictional holiday. Similarly, once Cottle became unable to come up or down stairs without the aid of his sisters, he described the process as expeditions over difficult terrain.

Cottle's reputation has never really recovered from the savaging it took from the Coleridge family following publication of *Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* immediately after the poet's death. By focusing on these various forms of circulation, I hope to recover the cohesiveness of Cottle's artistic and social vision, and rehabilitate *Recollections* and its expanded and retitled descendent *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey* not as score settling, but as efforts to recover something of his friends for posterity. Chapter 2 of this study then turns to the Lake District, 'Walking, Climbing, Descending: Negotiating the Landscape'. It begins with an account of Coleridge's nearly disastrous descent of Scafell via Broad Stand a near impassible vertical rock formation. Coleridge kept two accounts of his 1802 walk through the Lakes, a multiple sheet letter to Sara Hutchinson and a small notebook he carried for the purpose. Many of the notebook entries are produced in situ, including his elation at the summit of Scafell, subsequent panic when he realized he could not return the way he had come, and ultimately relief at having survived the experience. He wrote a more composed (in both senses) account in the letter the following morning. These experiences operate at the limit. Coleridge is 'out of his mind' as endorphins, adrenaline and dopamine combine to lead him into folly. His re-imposition of his rationality cannot be read as a recuperative triumph as it too involves primarily physiological and somatic experiences: lying still, allowing the lactic acid produced by his tired muscles to abate, and recovering his peripheral vision as the hormonal soup that's been driving him subsides. In short, the event is much closer to the 'simply terrible' than the sublime. Nonetheless, he claimed that it served as the source event for 'Hymn Before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouny'. The interplay of aesthetics and physiology serves as the central focus of this section of the book. In addition to Coleridge's misadventure, it describes William Wordsworth's futile efforts to reconcile his experience of the Langdale Pikes and philosophical aesthetics in one of the prose fragments from the

so-called *Unpublished Tour* manuscripts. Driven by a desire to secure the meaning and power of the mountains, even after repeated viewings, he equally feared that philosophical reflection might sacrifice the immediacy of the experience – the source of his pleasure, and ultimately of its value. In the end he simply could not negotiate this paradox. His sister Dorothy did much better. Her description of her ascent of Scafell Pike with her friend Miss Barker captures the elation of the ascent and the summit, and the unease and potential terror of a gathering storm. Chapter 2 also gives accounts of other members of the wider Wordsworth circle, including the Quaker Thomas Wilkinson, whose travel journal the Wordsworths and Coleridge used as their guide on their 1803 tour of Scotland, and who was also the author of *Tours to the British Mountains*. William's poems from the Scottish tour, Dorothy's travel journal and Coleridge's designated notebook provide vivid accounts of their individual negotiations of what seemed an alien world. Another of Wilkinson's friends, the brilliant autodidact Elizabeth Smith makes a dazzling appearance at the end of this section via her poems and letters, and as recorded by the affective responses to her premature death, aged twenty-nine, by those who knew her or knew of her. She appears in Wordsworth's *Unpublished Tour* as an invalid, a doomed genius and the translator of Klopstock; Wilkinson marvels at her prowess as a climber and fell-walker caught in sun-dazzled glimpses above him. The final word on Smith goes to Thomas De Quincey who provides an equally marvellous account of her ascent of Airy Force in bad weather – an account that has recourse to supernatural explanation. This intentionally skewed guide to the Lakes aims to supplement and expand critical notions of natural scenic beauty by putting individual authors in direct contact with the terrain. Motion and uncertainty condition such experiences and render aesthetic recuperation unlikely, and in some instances unwanted.

Chapter 3, 'Casting About: Thomas De Quincey in the World', shifts to Edinburgh with De Quincey's reminiscence of his departure by coach after his first meeting with the Wordsworths. The highly digressive essay *The Saracen's Head* describes walks, coach travel, memory and mourning (along with the Wordsworths) and was published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*. His work for *Tait's*, undertaken out of desperation to supplement his *Blackwood's* income while being pursued for debt and following the death of his beloved wife Peggy, included his vivid recollections of Coleridge, Wordsworth and the other Lakers, much to their dismay. These remarkable essays were produced under the extraordinary circumstance of his voluntary confinement to the Edinburgh debtor's sanctuary within the spatial bounds of Holyrood Park. Undisciplined to say the least, De Quincey could not

prevent himself from secretly slipping into Edinburgh to walk in the streets at night or visit friends by day. Constantly at risk for apprehension and arrest, he circulated through a series of safe houses as part of a frenzied, yet highly productive, writing routine: early supper, evening walking, writing (midnight until breakfast), deliver manuscript copy via one of his young daughters to *Tait's* and/or *Blackwood's*, revise, deliver finished articles, repeat. He produced the famous *Tait's* essays, the stories *The Household Wreck* and *The Avenger*, many essays on philosophy and economics for *Blackwood's*, et cetera, in this fevered rush of composition. His retrospective accounts of the Lakes arose in the context of this peripatetic compositional practice. Writing and memory served as active releases from the physical bounds in which he was confined; mobility and arrest underwrote his artistic output and strained aesthetic understanding as the picturesque and the sublime appeared as histrionics, anxiety so palpable as to feel like all risk, as potential dissolution without end. Despite the risk, especially following his wife Peggy's premature death, De Quincey used his stories and reminiscences to travel back to scenes which engendered his present fraught moment. Unlike the other writers in the book, De Quincey's mobility doesn't always happen on foot. Much of this section finds him riding on top of open coaches experiencing the feel of time as he hurtles into the future. The section concludes with a reading of *The English Mail-Coach*. The variable speeds in De Quincey texts reveal a longing for respite, for an impossible out-of-time. Could he pick apart the past to renovate the present, or must he accept the impossibility of personal recuperation even as he staged its possibility?

Chapter 4, 'Clare and Dislocation,' begins with an account of John Clare's poetry and poetics, focusing on their dedication to the careful delineation of 'lyric events'. The term 'lyric' combines the emotional intensity and power produced by the poem, its sheer musicality, its formal qualities, and often its subject matter. By naming such works 'events', I point to the complex interactions between poet, poetic speaker and the object world, resulting in the poem or prose fragment. I see these interactions as negotiations, temporal as much as spatial. In Clare's case, most famously, the terrain surrounding Helpston and its plant, animal and human inhabitants, even its geological strata provides the locus for his poetry and prose, a body of writing so extensive as to make it one of the most detailed accounts of a single small place ever produced. The intense engagement with his home place, understanding it as a set of lived events rather than as a collection of things, makes it unique. Clare certainly found precedents in other chronicles of village life, especially Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*, Gilbert White's obsessive reckoning of all the things

which constituted the village of Selbourne over many years, and even in Walton's *The Compleat Angler* which he referred to in his journal as the 'best pastoral'. Nonetheless, the poetry and underlying poetics defy the possibility of precedent. For example, Bloomfield's poetic avatar Giles might rest from his labour to watch a beetle climb a blade of grass, but such lived 'events' are exceptional, isolated moments in the descriptive chronicling of *The Farmer's Boy*, whereas such minutiae very often constitute Clare's subject. To call Clare's descriptions obsessive entirely misses the point. (Claims that Clare was 'only' a descriptive poet have a long history, and thankfully have been superseded.) He does not simply describe the things themselves in some naïve cataloguing procedure, but rather describes his interactions with such things in time, producing poems rich in the ineffable, in the fragile miracle of giving form to otherwise fugitive events. Sonnets, for Clare, prove to be ideal temporal units, fourteen lines in which even the briefest of events can unfold. His early sonnet 'A Scene' makes clear the difference between such a procedure and the eighteenth-century prospect poems he began by imitating.<sup>1</sup> The compositional finish of a Thomson poem, its unity, relies on the achievement of a beautifully arranged static view. The illusions of authorial power and the mastery of the viewer's gaze exercised a hold over poet and audience as they enjoyed the pleasures of the picturesque, its hint of 'roughness' subsumed in a carefully constructed order. The ethical and political problems of picturesque aesthetics have been much rehearsed, perhaps most thoroughly by Ann Bermingham in *Landscape and Ideology*. However, I'm not saying that Clare formulated a critique of the confluence of picturesque aesthetics, enclosure and capital, but rather that he recognized the illusory nature of the power over the landscape such works arrogated. Clare's 'scene' was radically open, allowing the superabundance of natural objects and human subjects to flood in. He renounced the exercise of aesthetic power in favour of faithfulness to the object world, and to recording his actual engagement with it. 'Formal negotiation' aptly describes his art practice; Clare sought the adequate form for what he saw and felt.

Despite having noted above that Helpston and environs were Clare's great subject, this chapter concentrates on Clare's move to Northborough, the so-called 'flitting'. The Northborough sonnets and the two great poems recording the move, 'The Flitting' and 'Decay: A Ballad', emerge as efforts to negotiate and perhaps constitute the new place. To understand this effort, I place the works in the context of his efforts to raise capital to outfit his new smallholding, his correspondence with his London friends FH Cary and Allan Cunningham in an effort to build a subscribers list for a new volume of poems, and his ongoing exchanges with Mrs Emerson,



including her purchase of the cow 'May' and a butter churn to help him establish himself in this new guise. It is difficult in retrospect not to see the whole thing as simply a 'guise', more Clare mimicry, but his patrons are as guilty as they sought to establish their poet as a smallholder, an economic class fraction that had been functionally obsolete for over a decade. Beyond the economics of the move, Clare struggled to understand the meaning and nature of 'home' that he might constitute a new one. In this vein he and his friend Joseph Henderson, the head gardener at Milton House, laid out the borders at the Northborough cottage and selected the plantings, not as an imitation of his Helpston garden, a small masterpiece of species variety and design created over many years, but rather as a new garden to suit its place. Nostalgia was not so paralyzing that he failed to recognize the specificity of each place; the utterly different physical situations, their unique ecosystems, meant the Northborough garden had to be of its place or fail to thrive. While Helpston and Northborough are separated by some two and a half miles, the apparent shortness of the distance matters not at all. Reading Clare's distress as an overreaction misses the point of his poetry, and ignores the astonishing quality of the body of work he had produced to date – the poetic representation of 'lyric events' in and around his home. His sadness did not become despair; otherwise the Northborough poems could not have been written.

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The critical interests pursued throughout this study intersect with several important current trends in understanding the field of Romantic Studies, especially as it concerns subjectivity, feeling, emotion, affective experience and response, and the formal structures which emerge from the constitutive events I describe and analyse, including the lyric. The recent collection *Romanticism and the Emotions*, edited by Joel Faflak and Richard Sha, reveals the complexity of these intersecting interests. Faflak's interests and focus are primarily psychoanalytic, for example, building on his work on the proto-psychoanalytic concerns of the period. Sha, on the other hand, comes to this critical terrain from the vantage of cognitive science.<sup>2</sup> So despite beginning from very different assumptions (should the unconscious be understood in psychoanalytic terms or as a vestigial effect of brain activity, for example), the editors find common cause in moving the critical conversation towards emotion and affect. This book participates in that general turn, and I profess membership in that very broad church. To be clear: this is not to say that I believe in the possibility or efficacy of establishing a unitary



Romantic subject, as if such a creature might pop out at the end of history. Thirty years of carefully nuanced historicist enquiry have shown us how individual subjects are necessarily interpolated by contingent forces, personal, social, political. The experiential moments I trace throughout the book reveal fragile transitory selves subjected to all kinds of forces, from the physiological demands of the terrain to the complexity of social conditioning. Put another way, this book follows the critical lead provided by Raymond Williams' discussion of 'structures of feeling' in his 1977 *Marxism and Literature*. Like Williams, I am 'concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt . . . characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating community' (132). I follow this famous critical prompt by elaborating moments of 'present consciousness' and the 'inter-related communities' in which it arises. Whereas Williams' broad goal is to reveal the underlying human forces driving social formations, mine is to reveal the reciprocal effects of such formations on individual human subjects – the manifold feelings of experience.

The writing I analyse attempts to represent these moments in transit where and when the self negotiates a fleeting lived experience and is temporarily constituted via that experience. In some cases, these representations seem pre-aesthetic, steeped in sensation, before the processes involved in perception and association convert them into aesthetic value via recuperation. In other cases, the experiences are simply unorganized and perhaps unorganizable – transitory moments beyond the possibility of aesthetic judgement/value, yet nonetheless redolent of the stuff that we are. When Coleridge records his foolishness in allowing his judgement to be clouded by endorphins on the top of Scafell, or De Quincey huddles in an Edinburgh doorway in the twilight to evade a 'catchpole', or Clare momentarily traces a nightingale back along the road to Royce wood and 'home', they are not in command of their faculties, yet writing provides an interval no matter how fleeting, a place of solace and sometimes simply of sense (in Coleridge's case) where, as events collapse into the past they produce a record of transitory shapes and constitutive power. Such writing opens up the quotidian, the everyday, and by way of illustration I offer some moments from early Coleridge poems and Dorothy Wordsworth's *Alfoxden Notebook* to show how such writing engages experience and time and creates glimpses of the furtive Romantic subject as it is constituted, collapses, is constituted, collapses, is constituted, et cetera.

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### **Walking, Thinking, Feeling**

Coleridge records a set of fleeting everyday experiences in his early poems, revealing the complexity and texture of the events I hope to excavate over the course of this study. He is equally famous for his complex and comprehensive consideration of philosophical reflection, especially apperception, the mind's capacity to reflect on its own reflexivity, as for this early poetry. His detailed rearrangement/recombination of Schelling, Fichte and his own ideas seeks to understand the status of thinking itself. While typical of Coleridgean philosophical pursuits, such self-reflection does not dominate his poetry. Here I explore his representations of 'events' that either escape reflection as part of quotidian everyday experience, or which remain unorganized, fugitive events for which reflective meaning cannot finally be assigned. Such events remain bodily, thus my choice of the word 'somatic' to describe them. This deferral of meaning seems adjacent to aesthetics, or perhaps a preliminary stage in some aesthetic operation, yet resists the reflective organization necessary for judgment. Nonetheless Coleridge's sheer responsiveness to sensory events, his openness to sensation, must be foundational in his subsequent working out of reflexive modes, including aesthetic judgment. What I hope to demonstrate is that such judgments don't represent the teleological ends of their engendering experiences, but rather the unstable vacillations and negotiations of complex everyday events.

I begin with the figure of Coleridge in the midst of idleness, yet somehow still attending to events. Understood as necessary to his poetics, inasmuch as they allow him to collect the stuff of poems, such moments often escape subsequent reflective meanings, whether aesthetic or religious. The lazy-day aspect of the Clevedon cottage poems illustrates this phenomenon. The status of his reverie in 'Effusion XXXV,' for example, cannot be established by the pious retrenchment of the final verse paragraph. The mind fails to organize the excess produced by the simplest events. For example, Coleridge's effusiveness as the poem opens translates into eager loquaciousness as he responds to the sheer rush of affective experience: 'most soothing sweet it is / To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown / With white-flowered jasmin, and the broad-leaved myrtle, / (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love)' (2–5). The repetition of 'our cot, our cot' captures his breathlessness, and the enjambed lines produce the effect for the reader, yet he doesn't seem satisfied with the sensual moment. The parenthetical aside converts that moment by allegorizing the jasmine and myrtle into Innocence and Love. In attempting to secure meaning from the fleeting richness of the lived

event, he accomplishes the opposite, reducing the moment to a poeticized cliché. The pattern immediately repeats, suggesting a drive to secure meaning amidst the flow of quotidian events, especially those associated with pleasure and well-being – the ‘soothing sweet[ness]’ of complex, yet ephemeral, experience. The wonderful description of the sensual textures of the immediate past gives way to another parenthetical effort after meaning: ‘...watch the clouds, that late were rich with light, / Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve / Serenely brilliant (such should wisdom be) / Shine opposite!’ (6–9). ‘Such should wisdom be’ strikes a note of desperation. At best a failed analogy – how should wisdom be like the sudden appearance of Venus above the horizon? – it repeats the awkwardness of the desire to insert meaning into the scene. Otherwise, the lines reveal human interiority as interplay with the phenomenal world, unfolding in time. Precise moments can never be achieved; they are both too complex to record and slipping into the past, so the poet records a series of ‘nows’: the present tense ‘watch,’ the barely past ‘were rich with light,’ the sudden epiphanic ‘mark’. Barely longer than the lines themselves, this temporal sequence tracks fleeting responses to stimuli. The alliterative ‘slow saddening round’ produces the calming effect described, and references both the diurnal passing the sunset evokes and the human melancholy inevitably entangled within it. The sudden ‘mark’ breaks the ‘slowness’ as the speaker awakes to the appearance of Venus. ‘Serenely brilliant’ literally describes the calmness of the night sky and the brightness of the planet, but also names the condition of the speaking/viewing subject affected by its sudden appearance. To take back my earlier comment a little bit: wouldn’t it be nice if ‘wisdom’ simply came to us in a series of epiphanies? Can effusions ‘naturally’ organize themselves into forms of wisdom?

In this case, an epiphany famously organizes itself as the poem. This becomes clear with the introduction of the central image of the wind harp as receptive mind – the space of potential wisdom. I won’t revisit those famous similes here,<sup>3</sup> and instead concentrate on the image immediately following – the idle sunny noonday. The vibrating pitch of ‘hovering on untamed wing,’ the suspended ending of the final simile, gives way to a new image surprisingly introduced with a ‘thus’. ‘Thus’ assumes an argument with a premise, yet no syllogism can be detected in the previous verse paragraph. The image I’m isolating then seems to stand, formally, as part of a propositional structure, but how? Here are the lines addressed to Sara:

And thus, my love! As on the midway slope  
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,

Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold  
 The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,  
 And tranquil muse upon tranquility;

(26–30)

The somatic event in these lines, squinting at the surface of the sea, creates an utterly commonplace, even childish, transformation as the sun-dazzle on waves becomes an array of diamonds. This is not an intentional or deliberate act. The eyelids automatically respond to the light, affecting the transformation. His discovery of the aesthetic value of such humble events forms part of the argument, as much as there is one, but the key realization comes at the end of the clause with the turn to considering the value of indolence itself. To ‘tranquil muse upon tranquility’ presents tautology as wisdom; only by giving oneself over to the transitory, the flux and flow of sensation, can such subtle and fleeting aesthetic transformations be registered. The presumed logic of the ‘thus’ presents an involuntary somatic event (squinting at the sun on the sea) as evidence of the value of letting things go. Idleness is paradoxically transformed into purposefulness. Letting go of the desire to secure the meaning of such events makes them meaningful; otherwise the lines describe a trivial event. The discovery of the plenitude inherent in each moment of existence seems the goal here, and only through giving ourselves over to bodily experience can we hope to register such value. The achieved state that ends the verse paragraph, then, far from a scene of laziness, reveals a profound meditative achievement – passivity as radical openness:

Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,  
 And many idle flitting phantasies,  
 Traverse my indolent and passive brain,

(31–3)

The language of social judgment, ‘idle’ and ‘indolent’, underlines his achievement by challenging conventional views, yet also marks his own self-division, as opposed to self-reflection – the crisis famously played out in the poem’s final verse paragraph. This imaginative pitch of allowing phantasies to rise and fall without attempting to secure them collapses in that ultimate deflation. The potentially heterodox religious views that he pulls back from in the end, however, arise in the flow of thoughts; in other words are undeliberate. His body becomes, like the harp, a sensitive surface, subject to vast physical influences. Coleridge feels and hears the divine in things as ‘naturally’ as he squinted at the sun. Choosing ‘passive brain’ instead of ‘mind’ or ‘imagination’ to describe the *receiver* of these

sensations and subsequent thoughts grounds his experience in his body. The blasphemous thought experiment, 'What if all animated nature / Be but organic harps diversely framed', comes to him as a sudden sensation, a recognition of the religious potential of the moment (perhaps of all moments). The impossibly small interval between fleeting sensations and fleeting thoughts carries him into a blasphemous relation to the divine, or at least the anxiety of it. When he declares that he can 'never guiltless' conceive of the divine, now posited as pure negation – 'the Incomprehensible' – we as readers object in part because responding to external stimuli is by definition 'guiltless'. Clearly he cannot theologically parse somatic events. The 'guilt', to his mind, must occur as it becomes mind, as sensation becomes thought. However, the alternative would entail closing the self off from experience, making effusion, and the poem, impossible. So despite denigrating the perceived events of the poem as childish affirmations:

Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break  
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.  
(48–9)

Coleridge recognizes the crisis in his effort to secure the events within a philosophical schema. The harp and its figuration as an indolent open mind were part of the intellectual atmosphere surrounding the poet, as much as the couple's physical mood of retirement in Clevedon. I'll take this up in Chapter 1 by placing the poem in the context of its companions, neighbours, in *The Cottle Album*. The soundings of the world underwrote a 'structure of feeling' at the heart of literary Bristol.

The glittering bubbles return us to the sun-dazzle on the sea, and our childish response; the crisis comes with the mind's efforts after meaning in the wake of such events. However, I want to vindicate the wonderfully musical 'aye-babbling spring' itself. If the effusion of the poem arises as one in a series of potentially endless affirmations, then how might we at least acknowledge, if not secure, the value of such transitory, yet transformative, moments? What do we affirm when we babble aye?

The instance of aye-babbling I have in mind occurs as a moment of recognition in 'This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison'. Having begun the poem in a mood of disappointed resignation at missing out on the walk with his friends, especially Charles Lamb, Coleridge 'discovers' that he need not be totally bereft, and this 'discovering' occurs in the way I've described earlier, as a kind of recognition out of the flow of sensation and the concomitant flow of associated ideas. The poem's second verse paragraph begins with an

unlikely temporal marker, 'Now' (20). This proleptic moment, imagining the progress of his friends' walk at that precise instant, propels him, via his reverie, out of his self-imposed isolation:

Now, my friends emerge  
Beneath the wide Heaven—and view again  
The many-steeped track magnificent  
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,  
With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up  
The slip of pure clear blue betwixt two Isles  
Of purple shadow!

(20–6)

The rush of objects to the mind's eye comes in a breathless succession of enjambed lines. The 'perhaps' disrupts the flow by revealing the fictionality of the scene (there is no bark), but only for a moment as the interplay of light, colour and motion sweep us along. The commas before and after 'and the sea' disrupt his reverie, but the phrase has the effect of projecting him further out – 'and the sea' – extending the prolepsis. The rush of visual experiences is finally punctuated by a double mid-line caesura: '! Yes!' (26). Graphically, the 'yes' is bracketed by two exclamation marks, the one following 'purple shadow' and its own. This 'aye' clearly emerges in the breathless babbling of the preceding lines, and the double emphasis makes the sound itself a 'natural' (for want of a better word) caesura. 'Yes!' emerges directly from the body as the sound of affirmation. It is simultaneously discovery and event – the sound of breath escaping the body in direct response to stimulus, even if that stimulus is largely imagined. I say largely because the play of light and the warmth of the sun on his body immediately affect him in the bower, and he projects those effects into the walk. 'Yes!' speaks without deliberation; it is more sound than word; and the authenticity of the reverie cannot be gainsaid because an automatic response by the body cannot lie – the affirmation must be real. Sitting in the bower, the 'yes' erupts from him, out of the 'aye-babbling spring' created by his evening indolence.

The 'now' that opened the verse paragraph also opened a series of fleeting now moments, but it is the 'yes' that comes closest to constituting such a moment in real time as it performs the poet's presence as a physical event. As such it also evades the impossible interval between sensation and association – between feeling and thought – and the fall into meaning-making and retrospect. For that instant he need not judge the status of his experience. Out of this 'aye-babbling' emerges the poem's lasting achievement, the moment when for the poet: 'A delight comes / Sudden on my

heart, and I am glad / As I myself were there!' (43–5). He is not 'there,' but he *is* 'glad'. Physically overwhelmed by the sensation of well-being, 'a delight comes sudden on [his] heart'.

The poem then shifts to retrospect, a revaluation of the immediate past, and a discovery of the potential of such languorous states of consciousness. Temporally, the retrospect is complex; it is of the immediate past, and also suggests that the experiences described were always present – just outside his attention during the reverie recorded in the previous lines: 'Nor in this bower, / This little lime-tree bower, have I not marked / Much that has soothed me' (45–7). This implied divided state, marking those soothing sensations of present moments while proleptically distant on the heath with his friends, perhaps accounts for the uncertainty of his negative formulation: 'have I not marked'. Read as a question, the obvious answer is that he does not know, or perhaps a simple no; *they* marked him. The subtle shifts in light, the heat of the sun, and the sounds of insects have surrounded him throughout, yet he has not attended to them directly. Instead he translated them into a distant scene – into the sublime grandeur of the sunset into the Bristol Channel. The lines that follow are among the most beautiful in Coleridge, and indeed as natural description among the most beautiful in English. They also bring him once again into the present moment:

And that walnut-tree  
Was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay  
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps  
Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass  
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue  
(51–5)

Part of his consciousness marked the play of light on the trees while he imagined Lamb looking at the sunset, and 'now,' at the end of another rush of enjambed lines, he gives the experience his full attention. Once in the present, he records a succession of moments: 'now the bat / Wheels silent by' (56–7) ending with the sound of the bee as it 'sings (present tense) in the bean-flower' (58–9). The poem's famous 'discovery' that 'Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure' (60), then, arrives not as a post-facto judgment, but in a rush of sensation – a somatic event tacitly admitted. Coleridge finds that he 'may well employ / Each faculty of *sense*' (*italics mine*) and that through such openness he might 'keep the heart / Awake to Love and Beauty' (63–4). That our capacity for Love and ability to judge Beauty are interrelated serves as a Coleridgean article of faith; yet no moral or aesthetic expansion can occur without the 'aye-babbling spring' of sensation.



The poem's final prolepsis performs this new knowledge, despite being almost impossibly attenuated:

...when the last rook  
Beat its straight path along the dusky air  
Homewards, I blest it!

(68–70)

Seeing the rook out of sight, beyond his perceptive field, Coleridge imagines the sound of its 'creaking' caw causing Lamb to look up, thus delivering his blessing. The extreme unlikelihood of this tenuous connection does not undermine its gestural sense. If Lamb automatically looks up, his body's visceral response to the 'dissonant' sound, then *his* personal world of sensation is crossed by his friend's. Openness to such experiences connects the friends; becoming ever alive to the sensual world and awaiting ever new effusions creates the possibility of love in such moments. Unsatisfied with Love the philosophical abstraction, Coleridge instead resituates it in the body, in a somatic event.

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In reading Coleridge's notebooks along analogous lines in her chapter 'Coleridge Among the Spectra,' Rei Terada isolates his central anxiety about the unreasonable risks entailed in opening himself to the world of things; 'I am *thinged*' he declares in horror (N 3587), yet only through submitting to thinging, as these poems show us, can the self be constituted by affirming itself in time (Terada, *Looking Away*, 41). The pun on the self in 'I-babbling insists on this point. The poet/philosopher cannot emerge without risking his utterly permeable body.

In order to further elaborate my method and to reemphasize this insistence on the bodily, I want to trace a sound as it moves through a set of works: a sigh in Coleridge's 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', to the susurrations of the trees in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Alfoxden Notebook*. This sound reaches an extraordinary formal apotheosis in the 'sighs from the depths' of De Quincey's *Suspiria di Profundis*; I'll take up the sound of mourning and grief he shapes at the end of Chapter 3. In such a tracing the sound moves from the physical automatic sounding of the body to the sound textures of the phenomenal world to a desperate allegorical attempt to mediate between such lived events. Rather than see these phenomena as distinct (the sighing subject, the sounds of the object world) I suggest an inseparability wherein the very transitoriness

of involuntary experience constitutes the texture of lived experience, the stuff of the self.

In 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' Coleridge interrupts his deeply personal reflections on the emotional, aesthetic and religious value of his experience with Sara in Clevedon to tell us a story. We know it's a story because it begins: 'once'. But before I turn to the story and its purpose in the poem, I want to examine the nature of the scene it seeks to explain (if that's the right word). Having established a scene of sensual beauty, the lovers, 'twined' like the 'jasmynes', are held in a multi-sensual embrace; the sound of the 'sea's faint murmur', the scent of the jasmine and myrtle, complete the visually arresting composition. The pleasure inherent in the scene, both for the speaker in retrospect and for the reader performatively, depends on this sensual overdetermination – is the source of pleasure the soothing calm of the constant distant murmur, or the even more ephemeral scent of the flowers? We cannot really parse such experiences given their complexity; imagine the subtlety of the shift from experiencing the scent of the myrtles to experiencing the scent of the jasmine, and of the combination of the two. Coleridge foregrounds this experiential plenitude by staging the scene as a series of events: 'In the open air / Our myrtles blossomed' (4–5), syntactically joined halves of two enjambed lines, read as an overwhelming sensual moment, transforming the entire world of experience, while also standing as a figure for sexual consummation. The mysterious relationship of sensation to figuration works like a kind of translation as the 'our' of 'our myrtles' gets dispersed into the 'open air'. Out of this experience of overwhelming sensual pleasure, the self diffused into the ether, Coleridge offers a surprisingly modest claim: 'the little landscape round / Was green and woody, and refreshed the eye' (6–7).

The sensual pleasure and beauty of the scene has the power to restore us. The 'eye' becomes jaded over time, and Coleridge seeks to establish (in aesthetic terms) that natural beauty has the power to transform the viewer, to 'refresh the eye'. Further he hopes that this is a natural and universal phenomenon – so perhaps not quite so modest a claim as it appears. Rhetorically then, the short 'once' narrative inserted into Coleridge's reminiscence of the complex systems of value inherent in the scene stands as evidence of the rightness of the poet's judgment, as a means of confirming the value of his pleasure. The young citizen from Bristol proves the ideal witness. He has walked out from Bristol on a Sunday, eschewing church for the restorative experience of the natural world. This coincides with the promise of having the 'eye refreshed', and the poet's parenthetical aside that

the walker was engaged in ‘Hallowing his Sabbath-day by quietness’ (10), expands the stakes of the poem (and this narrative demonstration within the poem) by asserting the religious content for such experiences.

Putting pressure on the presumed value of his experience, Coleridge confronts the problem of human isolation – the essential unknowability of others. The best he can do is stage the problem as a thought experiment: ‘methought, it calmed / His thirst of idle gold’ (12–13), admitting the impossibility of completely escaping solipsism. The challenge is how to discover evidence beyond his own *reading in*. As casual as the passage appears, it nonetheless pursues a particular line of argument: the life of commerce is debasing – spiritually, emotionally, morally – and constitutes a form of false worship, the blasphemy inherent in the pun on *idol* in ‘idle gold’. In this provocative social context, the intimate, pleasurable scene takes on new meaning as it serves a morally ameliorative function for the young man. The poem saves itself from polemics, by abandoning discursive lines of argument entirely, and proceeds via two somatic events. And this brings me to my central topic. These ‘events’ are conditioned by another interpretive moment in which the poet reads the walker’s ‘pause’ as ‘musing’:

. . .for he paused, and looked  
With pleased sadness, and gazed all around,  
Then eyed our cottage, and gazed round again,  
And sighed, . . .

(14–17)

I’ll come back to the oxymoron ‘pleased sadness’. The ‘pause’ then emerges out of a complex amalgam of smaller events. The scene arrests the walker, creating the pause, and he looks around, taking in the whole scene, and then looks around again, finally focusing on the cottage, the twining plants, perhaps the lovers. Pausing is involuntary; the walker doesn’t set out to constitute this particular view. The double-take (gazing around and then gazing around again) emphasizes automatic response; the walker is captured by the scene. The double-take creates emphasis; the cottage scene is so arresting that it compels the body to respond twice. It also reveals an almost instantaneous unfolding as the broader view is taken in and then immediately repeated and framed around the cottage. There can be no deliberation here – the body responds to the scene – stopping, looking and looking again. The value of the scene cannot be established via argument, but can be revealed through a rapid succession of somatic events. The physiological underwrites all else; the walker doesn’t choose to respond. The bodily

language that framed the event, that such scenes might ‘calm’ the viewer’s ‘thirst’ for the violent stimulations of Bristol, appears in a fresh light as ‘calm’ signifies slowing heart rate, regular breathing, etc.; and ‘thirst’ suggests natural appetite and by extension longing. The unfocused, even mindless, acquisitiveness of Bristol commerce might be replaced, at least temporally, by the natural and spiritual plenitude available in his momentary focus on the scene. Physically, it comes as no surprise then that the unfolding of the scene is punctuated by a ‘sigh’.

The meaning of the ‘sigh’, as a sound, cannot be established definitively (perhaps not even by the sigher); thus for listeners (the narrator, readers) it becomes overdetermined at the moment we respond to it. It may signify sadness, a sigh of longing for the all too brief nature of the young man’s respite from Bristol. The oxymoron ‘pleased sadness’ guides us in that direction; the evident pleasure of the experience mingled with its inevitable absence once his next turn takes him away. Such a psychosocial reading also makes sense given the poem’s evident political goals; Coleridge establishes the value of his Clevedon idyll as a prelude to arguing for the social necessity of abandoning it in favour of active opposition to the war. Bristol, of course, also signifies the production of wealth (‘idle gold’) via slave labour in the West Indies. In this light, the ephemeral nature of the sigh seems ethically risky if it signifies temporary relief from the debased life of commerce. If the moment acts as a form of recreation – the walker temporarily feeling better about his life – rather than as a moment of transformation potentially spurring a change in that life, then the sigh is useless in terms of social utility.

However, we don’t experience it that way; well at least I don’t, and as you know that’s the whole problem: I cannot determine the status of my readerly experience, just as Coleridge cannot determine the value of the sensual plenitude I described at the outset. The sigh could also signify a moment of pure pleasure – the body responding to natural beauty. Read as an aesthetic event, the sigh serves as a demonstration of that difficult moment in Kant’s ‘*Analytic of the Beautiful*’ where we long to universalize our experience of a moment of unconditioned ‘free beauty’ (Kant, *Third Movement*, section 16), yet doing so would remove us from the realm of aesthetics. Like Kant, our 1795 pre-Kantian Coleridge wants the agreement of everyone that the moment we judged was indeed beautiful (the double-take of the cottage scene in this instance), but the active pursuit of such agreement defeats it by reducing it to a conditioned event. To avoid/evade that trap, Coleridge stages the event as an unconditioned unfolding, and the sigh sounds the moment of aesthetic judgment. We can think of it

cinematically as a very short film of an aesthetic judgment occurring in time: look around, look around again, centre on the cottage, sigh. In the succeeding moment, the young man made an inference based on his experience: 'and said, it was a Blessed Place' (17), yet that pronouncement, for all its religiously laden content, cannot finally establish the universality of the judgment performed by the sigh. Rhetorically, Coleridge gets his wish and simply asserts his newly discovered certainty: 'And we were blessed' (18), but neither his statement nor the walker's has the force of the sigh. In essence, the body doesn't lie; breath escapes the body at the moment of recognition producing the sound/word – sigh. By extension we know that prior to that release, the body held something – stress, longing, dissatisfaction – and the sound of the sigh if nothing else sonically marks a letting go. The doubling of 'blessed', named by the walker, repeated by Coleridge, demonstrates longing for certainty about something that cannot be certain. But from the opposite perspective, 'blessed' is redundant – a post facto naming of what the sound performs – and 'sigh' is the bodily sound of blessedness, a somatic event, just as it punctuates the moment of aesthetic judgment.

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The affective power of the 'sigh', whether motivated by aesthetic or religious desire, assumes an active listener. In his need, the citizen of Bristol longed for release and that longing made him sensitive to the stimuli around him. Coleridge ends the verse paragraph by developing the relationship of hearing to listening. The necessary condition, possessing a 'patient ear' (18), makes possible the transformative potential in what otherwise remain the quotidian sounds around us – the buzz of the everyday. He presents the difference between passive hearing and active listening (JH Prynne is brilliant on this topic in his reading of Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper'); the value of the sounds are: 'only heard / When the soul seeks to hear' (24–5). Once the 'soul seeks to hear' the world becomes the potential source of incalculable plenitude: 'when all is hushed, / And the heart listens' (25–6). The sound 'hushed' works like the 'sigh', producing a moment of calm via its universally soothing 'shh'.

The capacity for what we might call 'heart-listening' represents the singular attribute Coleridge observes in Dorothy Wordsworth in his famous description from July 1797:

Wordsworth & his exquisite Sister are with me . . . Her manners are simple, ardent, impressive . . . Her information various—her eyes watchful in

minutest observations of nature—and her taste a perfect electrometer—it bends, protrudes, and draws in at subtlest beauties & most recondite faults.

The second moment I want to explore briefly is actually a composite of several moments in the 'Alfoxden Notebook' where Dorothy records the sound of the wind in the trees, susurrations. Her capacity for listening, which Coleridge compared to the newly invented instrument for recording fine changes in electrical charge, is particularly sensitive as she exquisitely selects and records sounds: 'the unseen birds singing in the mist' (9) or 'the half dead sound of the near sheep-bell, in the hollow of the sloping coombe' (2). In this rich aural array, she seems particularly drawn to the woods, both as practical shelter from rain and hail, and for the affective power of their sound patterning. The woods around Alfoxden House include those in Holford Combe, the smaller adjacent combe, and the long bank of mature hollies that borders the Alfoxden property. They offered the best refuge from bad weather: 'A violent storm in the wood; sheltered under the hollies' (3). Under the hollies she records the sound of the passing storm: 'The sound of the pattering shower, and the gusts of wind, very grand. Left the wood when nothing remained of the storm but the driving wind, and a few scattering drops of rain' (3). Her recorded response, 'very grand', seems inadequate to the detailed transitory scene. As the gusts shake the hollies they threaten to open the tight canopy to the 'pattering shower', and the fragility of her position in the midst of the storm enlivens the scene, gives it its charge. The following day, while gathering the boughs brought down by the storm, she and William are caught in another high wind: 'The trees almost *roared*, and the ground seemed in motion with the multitudes of dancing leaves, which made a rustling sound, distinct from that of the trees' (4). Again, she makes fine discriminations of the sounds constitutive of her aural experience, roaring giving way to rustling. The violence of the scene is revealed as they leave the protection of the woods: 'The wind beat furiously against us as we returned' (4) – an image of them with their heads down leaning into the wind and making for home. Yet for Dorothy this purposefulness gets disrupted by a sudden visual stimulus: 'Full moon' (4). The rest of the entry describes the moonrise and her decision on reaching home to marry her two desires, her two needs for shelter and aesthetic stimulus: 'Sat with the window open an hour in the moonlight' (4). The recorded event: 'Full moon', comes close to the converse of the one I described in Coleridge's 'Reflections' where the sound of the 'sigh' punctuated the visual scene; here the sudden appearance of the moon punctuates the sound and tactile

force of the storm. Also conversely, the aural moments I'm isolating from Dorothy's notebook, the shifting sounds of the trees sighing, rustling and roaring describe the external world taken into the self-as-electrometer. The release of the sigh in the poem sounds like some form of interiority leaving the body and entering the world. Why then place these apparently converse moments next to each other?

This adjacency constitutes the kind of experiential texture and density that Coleridge attempts to capture at the beginning of his poem. The self opens the heart and listens. As readers we open ourselves to the possibilities of the sound of the 'sigh' in the knowledge that any meaning we discover must be temporary and uncertain. Nevertheless we are changed by the event. Dorothy's entries position her and her friends in this enlivened, electric field of sounds and other sensations. Even apparently at rest in the wood, the wind invades the scene and the permeable bodies sheltering there:

Sat down in a thick part of the wood. The near trees still, even to their topmost boughs, but a perpetual motion in those that skirt the wood. The breeze rose gently; its path distinctly marked, till it came to the very spot where we were. (6)

This serves as a striking illustration of Coleridge's characterization of Dorothy, as her stillness allows her to record these minute shifts in the atmosphere. The forest canopy moves revealing the marked path of the breeze. The image suggests their receptivity as they sit still and await the coming influence – a radical receptivity central to their developing poetic faith. In early April she records a scene that perfectly captures their collective appetite for such experiences. Reporting a 'very high wind' that drove Coleridge from his smoky cottage, they nonetheless eagerly entered the wood:

We walked in the wood, and sat under the trees. The half of the wood perfectly still, while the wind was making a loud noise behind us. The still trees only gently bowed their heads, as if listening to the wind. The hollies in the thick wood unshaken by the blast; only, when it came with a greater force, shaken by the rain drops falling from the bare oaks above. (12)

Haunting and exquisite, this final iteration of one of their favourite moments serves as the ultimate achievement of her patient recording during the preceding months, and forces us to reconsider the charge of excessive repetition often levelled against the notebook. The specificity of each of these concurrent moments creates an array of almost impossibly subtle differences. Here, the interplay of silence and sound, stillness and



motion, heads bowed with the trees ‘listening to the wind’ captures the human condition Coleridge describes as attending to the deep hush in the world, and opening oneself as the ‘heart listens’.

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When I introduced this aggregate moment – a moment created over time by being conditioned by prior moments – I referred to the sound in the trees as *surration*. I’m grateful to Kerri Andrews for telling me that botanists have adopted this term to describe the sound of the wind in the trees from its more general meaning ‘whispering’, ‘rustling’, ‘murmuring’ (depending on the dictionary you consult). ‘Murmuring’ is where I want to push this reading of the relations between listener and world. The fleetingness of such experiences creates contradictory moments difficult to untangle. The repeated ‘murmur’ in William Wordsworth’s ‘The Discharged Soldier’, for example, probably has its origin in Dorothy’s recording of the dog howling to the murmur of the stream in her notebook. I emphasize *recording* because the notebook, as a source, would evoke an aural memory; its affective power could then be transferred into the poem. Just as we cannot determine the meaning of a sigh, neither can we stabilize the aural effect of a murmur. Its repetition in the poem dramatizes this condition as we first experience the sound as the distant stream, deeply soothing, contributing to the walking Wordsworth figure’s profound sense of well-being and vitality. When the sound next appears, it is escaping the lips of the abstracted soldier – suggesting some unknowable internal distress. Our inability to know the source of the sound and its meaning becomes the problem of the poem as the speaker observes the soldier, questions him and questions him again. Our inability to know the other, to understand distress that we might ameliorate its causes, saps the deep calm of the poem’s opening, and leaves the narrator bereft – the overdetermined ‘murmur’ functioning like a more terrifying version of the unknowable ‘sigh’ I began with. *Reading* such moments must always be vexed with uncertainty, but nonetheless gets at the stuff of experience, the unconditioned events that make us.

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Each of the book’s chapters begins by placing the reader in transit, entering a walk in *medias res*: walking to Tintern in the dark with Joseph Cottle, Coleridge, Southey, and Sara and Edith Fricker; descending from the summit of Scafell with Coleridge; repeatedly riding the Kendal coach

to and from Grasmere with De Quincey; Clare and the reader running for shelter from the imminent rain. The rationale here is simple, the creation of textual experiences analogous to the lived events the writers attempt to capture – impossible wishes played backwards from the phenomenal world of things, to the individual authors, to the present author, to the reader. This immersion in experience can only be fictional, and at several removes, but nonetheless underwrites the discussions that follow in each section. Unlike the moments I've isolated by way of illustration here, those selected below are, for the most part, less familiar, non-canonical: notebook entries, letters, unpublished manuscript scraps, works by largely unknown writers. Choosing literary ephemera resists moves to received meaning and allows the complexity of events to speak. Put another way, I've chosen unorganized transitory events to preserve the feeling of being in transit.