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Introduction: Sibylline Leaves

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Introduction

Sibylline Leaves

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE TAKES ITS TITLE FROM SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S poetry collection *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), which was first intended as a companion for *Biographia Literaria* (also 1817), a project that William Hazlitt considered no more significant than the "soiled and fashionable leaves of the *Morning Post*."¹ In 1820 Coleridge extended his metaphor, juxtaposing the composition of his "GREAT WORK" with transcription from "so many scraps and *sibylline* leaves, including the Margins of Books & blank Pages."² The wry title *Sibylline Leaves* ennobles Coleridge's "fragmentary and widely scattered" poems with an allusion to the Cumaean Sibyl and the sometime hieratic and tightly controlled, sometime mendacious and miscellaneous form of the sibylline books.³ But it also focuses readers' attention on the realities of the contemporary moment: many poems were published in and subsequently excavated from the flying leaves of cheap, ephemeral newspapers.

From the prophetic to the everyday, this special issue explores the play of papers between proliferating snips, scraps, and scattered leaves, and their prospective and retrospective relationship with the "great work," the complete edition, or the philosophical system. The "leaf in flight" serves as a guiding metaphor that is rooted in shifting bibliographic materialities, disciplinary conventions, and domains of practice. Using the title of Coleridge's collection as a starting point, this special issue traces some of the ways in which individual and institutional collecting practices engage with the dynamic tradition of sibylline leaves, and assimilate and contain loose papers, detached pieces, and flighty scraps. The archives we explore are sites of destruction as much as conservation; under the imperative of preservation, individual items are sometimes reconstituted in their singularity, retrospectively disbound and thus detached from their bibliographic history. These materials redirect Romanticism's interest in fragments and the relationship between parts and wholes by taking on the metaphor of the leaf in flight and exploring its material and conceptual scope. *Sibylline Leaves* encourages us to rethink the intuitive teleology from manuscript to

1. Hazlitt, review of *Biographia Literaria*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Edinburgh Review* 28 (August 1817): 491.

2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), 5:1228.

3. Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems* (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), i.

complete work, examining the ways in which the fugitive logic of the scrap is inscribed in codex forms.

The classic articulation of the Sibyl's flying leaves can be found in the third book of Virgil's *Aeneid*. When Aeneas encounters the Cumaean Sibyl outside her cave, she writes the fates upon leaves and lays them out before the entrance, but if "a blast of wind" or vapor lift them in the air,

She resumes no more her Museful Care:
Nor gathers from the Rocks her scatter'd Verse;
Nor sets in order what the Winds disperse.⁴

Virgil's use of anaphora emphasizes the Sibyl's recalcitrance. As Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass point out, the word "gathering" in Dryden's translation presents the Sibyl's flying leaves through the bibliographic encoding of the codex.⁵ In the monumental folio edition of Dryden's translation of Virgil, these words emphasize the tension between two different models of textual production and dissemination. The unpredictability of the Sibyl's flying leaves can be contrasted to Virgil's imperial mission to justify and celebrate the Roman reign of Augustus, as much as to the Sibylline books as a means of state power. The Sibyl's recalcitrance suggests alternative paper trails—a dynamic, reversible, and diverse corpus, whose textual condition challenges the stability of the codex.

For Shaftesbury, the disbound leaves of the Sibyl were part of a deliberate strategy of obfuscation. In the *Miscellanies* he noted the Sibyl's wisdom in "writing her *Prophetick* Warnings and pretended *Inspirations* upon *Joint-Leaves*; which, immediately after their elaborate Superscription, were torn in pieces, and scatter'd by the Wind."⁶ This ephemeral and fragmented textual condition protects the Sibyl from public scrutiny:

T'was impossible to disprove the DIVINITY of such *Writings*, whilst they cou'd be perus'd only in *Fragments*. Had the Sister-Priestess of DELPHOS, who deliver'd herself in audible plain *Metre*, been found at any time to have transgress'd *the Rule of Verse*, it wou'd have been difficult in those days to father the lame Poetry upon APOLLO himself. But where the Invention of *the Leaves* prevented the reading of a single Line entire; whatever Interpretations might have been made

4. Virgil, *The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics and Aeneis*, trans. John Dryden (London: Tonson, 1697), 334.

5. Chartier and Stallybrass, "What is a Book?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 193–195.

6. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London, 1711), 3:232.

of this *fragil* and *volatil* Scripture, no Imperfection cou'd be charg'd on the *Original* TEXT it-self.⁷

Shaftesbury concludes by identifying Old and New Rome in the shrouding of sacred writings from public view: “refusing to submit *that Scripture* to *Publick* Judgment, or to any Eye or Ear but such as they qualify for the Inspection of such sacred Mysterys.”⁸

The English translation of the *Sibylline Oracles* in 1713 prompted renewed scrutiny of the complex, layered, and multiple authorship of the sibylline books. Eighteenth-century texts drawing from classical sources such as Pliny and Varro, mediated by Aulus Gellius’s *Noctes Atticae*, tell the story of a woman offering nine sibylline books to King Tarquinius, first destroying three and then three more as the king fails to meet her asking price, and finally obliging him to settle for the original price for the remaining three books, which he then placed in the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter where they remained until they were destroyed by fire in 83 BC. Subsequently, delegations were sent to Ilium, Erythrae, Samos, Sicily, and Africa to collect sibylline verses in order to reconstitute an augmented corpus of *Sibylline Books*. This varied body of writings from different sources was placed under lock in the Capitol and consulted at times of state calamity.⁹ Lactantius, Augustine, and other Christian Fathers adopted Varro’s Sibyls, attributed a book to each of them, and used them as pagan evidence of the Christian prophecy.¹⁰ However, the authenticity of such a historically composite, miscellaneous, and polymorphous collection was frequently called into doubt during the eighteenth century.

The scattered leaf functions as a poetic trope in a wider economy of paper. In the fifth night of *Night Thoughts* (1743) Edward Young uses the contrast between the Sibyl’s leaves and sibylline books to ward off the “pompous promise” of “empty *worldly* Wisdom,” whose plans are “all in Leaves, / Like *Sibyl*, unsubstantial, fleeting Bliss,” pointing to the more substantial alternative of “divine wisdom”: for “the Good Man’s Days to *Sibyl*’s Books compare.”¹¹ In this religious context, the flying leaves of earthly life await binding in the divine book at the day of reckoning. The collected edition’s monumental claims to shape the corpus of the author stand in tension with the dynamic

7. Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 3:233–34.

8. Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 3:235.

9. William Whiston, *A Vindication of the Sibylline Oracles* (London: Printed for the Author, 1715), 22; Adam Alexander, *Roman Antiquities: or, an account of the manners and customs of the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Creech, 1792), 304–6.

10. Jane Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85–93.

11. Young, *The Complaint. Or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality. Night the fifth* (London: Dodsley, 1743), 24–25.

disorder of writing found in authors' papers and notebooks. William Collins contrasted the prophetic disorder of Shakespeare's inspired "*Sibyl-Leaves, the Sport of ev'ry Wind*" to the "forming Hand" of Sir Thomas Hanmer, editor of a monumental edition of Shakespeare.¹² Less sublime connotations associate the ephemeral materiality of sibylline leaves to the unpredictable circulation of rumor in broadsides, detached pieces, and newspapers. In Alexander Pope's handling of riches, the prophetic power of the Sibyl is attributed to paper money that "lends corruption better wings to fly":

A leaf, like Sibyl's, scatter to and fro
Our fates and fortunes, as the winds shall blow:
Pregnant with thousands flits the Scrap unseen,
And silent sells a King, or buys a Queen.¹³

Writing to his publisher, Keats plays up the figurative potential of money as a "manufactured rag," "paper, light as the Sibyl's leaves in Virgil," "enchanted paper" that will be sufficient to defeat the hydra.¹⁴ Other authors emphasized the potentially fraudulent status and questionable authority of the Sibyl's books. A reviewer of Robert Southey's *Metrical Tales, and other Poems* (1805), regretted that, unlike the Cumaean Sibyl, he did not burn two-thirds of his collection.¹⁵

As a collection of detached pieces, the Sibyl's leaves offer a productive analogy for books of drawings and prints. In *America a Prophecy* (1793), Blake's revolutionary character Orc associates the ten commandments with the medium of the book as a form of imposition: "that stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad / To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves."¹⁶ In contrast to the stability of a canon of established religion, Blake's books of prints subvert the sacred codes, which embody the codex's role as a Urizenic tool of domination. The "fiery joy" that Blake associates with scattered leaves points to an alternative sibylline textuality.¹⁷ In his illuminated prophetic books each copy is deliberately different. His evolution toward an increased number of full plate illustrations opens up

12. Collins, *An Epistle: Address to Sir Thomas Hanmer, on his Edition of Shakespear's Works*, 2nd ed. (London: Dodsley, 1744), 11.

13. Pope, "Epistle III. To Allen Lord Bathurst," in *Epistles to Several Persons* (London, 1744), 46.

14. Keats to Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, Margate, May 16, 1817, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. H. E. Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958): 1:145, 146.

15. Unsigned review of *Metrical Tales, and Other Poems*, by Robert Southey, *Annual Review and History of Literature* 4 (1805): 579.

16. William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 54.

17. Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 54.

the book to different sequences in which new juxtapositions produce new prophetic possibilities.

As a figure of dispersal, the dynamism of the Sibyl's leaves tossed by the wind points to the life cycle of paper. The periodical essayist fears "the fatality attending these loose sheets, that though at their first publication they may be thought as precious as the *Sibyl's* leaves, the next moment they may be thrown aside as no better than a last year's almanack."¹⁸ A satirical "Essay on Learning" published in *La Belle Assemblée* in 1807 traces "the fate of books," as leaves taken from "whole libraries in pieces" and distributed to customers, while the tradesman "like the Sibyl, cares not a farthing what becomes of them."¹⁹ Yet such recycling offers a new life to old pamphlets on "liberty, non-conformity, and whiggism," which "*Tim Tear-Title*, the grocer" wrapped around wares destined for New England: "it is not at all to be doubted that the importation of this cargo spread the wild-fire rebellion among the Bostonians."²⁰ Sibylline chance has the prophetic power to make the political pamphlets come true. The satirical essayist finds propriety, or "fitness of things . . . in wrapping up a cheesecake in pastoral, sugar candy in a dedication, or gun-powder in a sermon on the 5th of November."²¹ Instead of representing dissolution in the material cycle of books, recycling releases the sibylline prophetic content in papers disbound from their earlier bookish forms. The political dynamism of loose leaves is harnessed in a review of William Wordsworth's 1809 pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra, an "illustrious example" of "Sibylline leaves, (full of old portentous and awful denunciations,) snatched from the winds, and stitched loosely together to make a pamphlet of only one day's longer life than a newspaper."²² The "pulse" of philanthropy and patriotism distinguishes the pamphlet from other "political ephemera, quickened from the carcasses of transient events which Time leaves behind him . . . ephemera, which flutter for a day, then vanish forever": Wordsworth's gathering of leaves is thus a "Genius" among "fugitive[s]."²³ A reviewer of Southey's *History of the Peninsula War* (1823) identified this kind of ephemeral dispersal as a great evil, asking "are not republican and revolutionary doctrines circulated every month, every week, every day, in flying leaves, and penny publications?"²⁴

18. *The Connoisseur* 29 (August 15, 1754): 171.

19. Rev. H. Kett, "Essay on Learning," *La Belle Assemblée: or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 3 (November 1807): 269.

20. Kett, "Essay on Learning," 269.

21. Kett, "Essay on Learning," 270.

22. Unsigned review of *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain and Portugal to each other and the Common Enemy at this Crisis; and specifically as affected by the Convention of Cintra*, by Wordsworth, *The Eclectic Review* 5 (August 1809): 744.

23. *Eclectic Review* 5 (August 1809): 744.

24. Unsigned review of *History of the Peninsula War*, by Southey, *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany; a New Series of the Scots Magazine* 12 (January-June

Collections dispersed by auction were also compared to Sibyl's leaves. The *Gentleman's Magazine* reflected on the fate of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery paintings sold in separate lots by Christie's: "this great collection is scattered like the Sibyl's leaves."²⁵ Thomas Frognall Dibdin pointed out the advantage of reaping the "fruits of book-labour" when the libraries of Isaac Reed, Richard Gough, and Joseph Windham were sold by auction between 1807 and 1811: "you must attend the auction; you must see how such a treasure is scattered, like the Sibylline leaves, by the winds of fate. You must catch at what you want."²⁶

Sibylline ecology surfaces in the dead leaves and "winged seeds" that herald the coming of spring in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (1819). The poem's closing imperative—"Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind! / Be through my lips to unawakened earth / The trumpet of a prophecy!"—redirects the Sibyl's impetuosity to regenerating ends as fierce winds aid and amplify "new birth."²⁷ For Andrew Stauffer, Shelley's poetry activates the "recurrent trope of scattered leaves as an index of Romantic concerns about the fates of works on paper in the age of industrial papermaking."²⁸ Stauffer identifies a tension between two modes of dispersal—scattering and driving. The first is entropic and contingent, the second deliberate and forceful; both are "shadowed by the negation of the gathering, collecting and preserving that works on paper require."²⁹

The Sibyl functions as a syncretic figure of metapoetic composition as much as material disaggregation.³⁰ She is most explicitly restored to Romantic "works on paper" in Mary Shelley's third novel *The Last Man* (1826). Shelley's introductory conceit is that the apocalyptic text of the novel was discovered in the Sibyl's cave by the author on a trip to Naples in 1818. "On examination," Shelley wrote, "we found that all the leaves, bark, and other substances, were traced with written characters."³¹ Shelley's description collapses the metaphorical distance between arboreal

1823): 212.

25. "Supplementary Number to the large Prints of Shakspeare," *Gentleman's Magazine* 75, no. 2 (August 1805): 738.

26. Dibdin, *Bibliomania; or, Book Madness* (London, 1811), 405.

27. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound: a Lyrical Drama in four Acts with Other Poems*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley (London: C. and J. Ollier, 1820), 192.

28. Stauffer, "Romanticism's Scattered Leaves," *Romanticism on the Net* 41–42 (Feb–May 2006), <https://doi.org/10.7202/013155ar>.

29. Stauffer, "Romanticism's Scattered Leaves."

30. Emily Pillinger, *Cassandra and the Poetics of Prophecy in Greek and Latin Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 160–65.

31. Shelley, *The Last Man* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 1:viii.

and bookish leaves. The writing is not only unbound, but heteroglossic, trans-historical, “not indeed as Virgil described it” but close enough to be instantly recognizable to the narrator and her companion:³²

Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form . . . I have often thought, that, obscure and chaotic as they are, they owe their present form to me, their decipherer. . . . Doubtless the leaves of the Cumaean Sibyl have suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence in my hands.³³

Mary Shelley’s imagined archival processes reconstitute the “fragmented chronicle” and “disrupted time” of the plague tale through what Timothy Ruppert describes as “collative art.”³⁴ Anne K. Mellor argues that Shelley “invokes the ultimate female literary authority, the oracle of the Sibyl, to authenticate her prophetic vision,” but this invocation is a double-edged sword, since Shelley’s introduction “posits the end of writing” and a challenge both to the illocutionary power of prophetic utterance and to the idealism exemplified in “Ode to the West Wind.”³⁵

Over time, the chthonic and recalcitrant figure of the Sibyl comes to represent a different model for women’s insight and authorship. In 1873, F. W. H. Myers described George Eliot meditating on the three words “God,” “Immortality,” and “Duty”; the first “inconceivable,” the second “unbelievable,” the third “peremptory and absolute”: “her grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a Sibyl’s in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me with the third scroll only, awful and inevitable fates.”³⁶ Myers’s anecdote conflates the burning of the sibylline books with Eliot’s stern affirmation. Journalist and novelist Elizabeth Lynn Linton also recounted the conscious artifice of Eliot’s sibylline self-fashioning: “Never for one instant did she forget her self-created Self—never did she throw aside the

32. Shelley, *Last Man*, 1:viii.

33. Shelley, *Last Man*, 1:x.

34. Ruppert, “Time and the Sibyl in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*,” *Studies in the Novel*, 41, no. 2 (2009): 145, 142. See also Orienne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786–1826* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2013), 210–18.

35. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 158. See also Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution and Prophecy*, 217–18; and Efrossini Spentzou, “Introduction: Secularizing the Muse,” in *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature*, ed. Efrossini Spentzou and Dan Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18–20.

36. Myers, “George Eliot,” *Century* 23 (1881): 62. See also David Carroll, “George Eliot: The Sibyl of Mercia,” *Studies in the Novel* 15, no. 1 (1983): 10–11.

trappings or the airs of the benign Sibyl.”³⁷ A genealogy of women writers came to light when Anne Isabella Thackeray, Lady Ritchie decided to republish her *Cornhill Magazine* essays on Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Amelia Opie under the title *A Book of Sibyls* (1883), dedicated to Mrs Oliphant, for it “would not be complete without your name, dear Sibyl of our own.” What the Sibyl’s legacy represents for the author can be gleaned in the final pages of the book:

[Austen] built her nest, did this good woman, happily weaving it out of shreds, and ends, and scraps of daily duty, patiently put it together; and it was from this nest that she sang the song, bright and brilliant, with quaint thrills and unexpected cadences, that reaches us here through near a century.³⁸

Unlike the Cumaean Sibyl’s wilful refusal to gather her leaves, Austen’s industrious impetus to “gather,” “weave,” and “buil[d] her nest” matches Eliot’s sense of duty but retains both “promise” and prophetic reach, offering an alternative account of the modern Sibyl’s prophetic craft. The result of Austen’s dedicated gathering and lucent song is “a whole, completed and coherent.”³⁹ Thackeray Ritchie concludes the book two pages later with a brief description of Austen’s death at Winchester, in July 1817—the same month in which Coleridge published his *Sibylline Leaves*.

This special issue participates in a widespread scholarly interest in the materiality of composition and publication. Moving against textual bibliographers’ aim to establish an ideal or definitive text, recent work on material texts has focused on textual instability and the composite nature of the codex as a dynamic compilation of book parts that should be considered as “separate component pieces, each possessed of particular conventions and histories, each enjoying a different relationship to the main text, and each the product of distinct kinds of labour.”⁴⁰ *Interacting with Print: Elements of Reading in the Era of Print Saturation* (2019) reconstructs a hybrid material culture of making and knowing by collecting loose leaves, and cutting up catalogue entries to be repurposed as captions for prints, drawings, plants, and other specimens. Dahlia Porter’s work traces Romantic literary experiments and composite forms back to the Enlightenment projects of scientific experiment and information management.⁴¹ Michael

37. Linton, *My Literary Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), 98–99.

38. Thackeray Ritchie, *A Book of Sibyls* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1883), 226–27.

39. Thackeray Ritchie, *A Book of Sibyls*, 227.

40. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth, “Introduction,” in *Book Parts*, ed. Duncan and Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4.

41. Porter, *Science, Form and the Problem of Induction in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Gamer contrasts the dynamic of remaking inherent to constructing the “Corpus, Canon, and the Self-Collected Author” to the fugitive ephemerality of John Bell’s miscellanies.⁴²

What kind of Romanticism would emerge by tracing the temporary and ephemeral textual condition of the Sibyl’s leaves as an alternative to the stability of the author’s corpus? A recent issue of *Studies in Romanticism* on “The Matter of the Archive” (2018) advocates the need to “attend as much to the disassembly and dispersal as to the assembly of archive and attend to the role of chance in their creation and their use”; Jonathan Senchyne traces the “intersection of real and imagined materiality of paper” and the “*imagined* circuit” of paper in IT-narratives; while Lynch discusses albums as “books that come together only as other books come apart”, “a collection point for those slips and scraps, and a way-station that those paper-objects occupied previous to their further detachment and transportation elsewhere.”⁴³ As a productive Romantic metaphor, the Sibyl’s leaves point to the ephemeral materiality and instability of Romantic paper archives. Their material articulations offer a composite, hybrid, and miscellaneous Romantic textual condition. What’s at stake in claiming the position of the Sibyl? What part does the scrap have to play in the codification of knowledge? Is there a sibylline method or logic to the anticipatory and retrospective dynamic of the specimen in relation to the collection? What does it mean to write “miscellaneous” and how are the Sibyl’s flimsy supports of writing reorganized and remediated in more permanent forms?

The special issue opens with two essays that investigate Coleridge’s sibylline poetics. In “Coleridge’s Desultoriness,” Seamus Perry explores the ways in which the 1817 collection materializes the poet’s “desultory habits” of thinking and writing (26). Perry maps the poet onto the Sibyl, positioning Coleridge as “keeper of his own archive” and his collection as paradoxically *un*collected: “a writing life only imperfectly or provisionally gathered,” and one that does not conform to the standards of self-canonization set by his contemporaries (26, 25). Looking beyond the collection, Perry posits “desultory composition” as a kind of sibylline textual game in which the poem on the “page manages to recreate a sense of scattered leaves” (31, 32).

42. Gamer, *Romanticism, Self-Canonisation and the Business of the Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

43. Theresa M. Kelley and Deidre Shauna Lynch, “The Matter of the Archive: Introduction,” in “The Matter of the Archive,” ed. Theresa M. Kelley and Deidre Shauna Lynch, special issue, *Studies in Romanticism* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 5; Jonathan Senchyne, “Vibrant Material Textuality: New Materialism, Book History, and the Archive in Paper,” in “The Matter of the Archive,” 72; Lynch, “Paper Slips: Album, Archiving, Accident,” in “The Matter of the Archive,” 89, 91.

Coleridge's handling of his own scattered leaves stands as a counterpoint to systematic approaches to knowledge and stable forms of self-canonization. Marianne Brooker's "Volatilia: Coleridge, Sibylline Leaves, and Fugitive Knowledge" identifies alternative bibliographic and philosophical genealogies for Coleridge's compilations of fugitive pieces, in which the logic of "fugitive causes" produces fated juxtapositions of miscellaneous materials (35). This sibylline textual condition is mediated by Heraclitus, and by the infamously "aphorismic and disconnected method" that Coleridge fashions in the philosopher's image (44).

Other sibylline media are mobilized in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* (1807). In choosing to re-enact Domenichino's *Cumaean Sibyl* (1617) in her poetic improvisation at the Capitol, Corinne reveals the performative function of Sibyl paintings in constructing a genealogy for women writers and artists. In "Modern Sibyls and Sibylline Media," Luisa Calè follows visual lines of textual transmission, exploring what happens to the Sibyl's leaves and books when they become visual props in the still life of painting. Focusing on Benjamin West, Angelica Kauffmann, Emma Hamilton, Friedrich Rehberg, and Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, the essay explores how painters and engravers re-mediated the Sibyl's books. Whether demediated as rectangles that exhibit illegible sibylline writing to mark the impossibility of reading at the center of painting, or reinvented as dynamic collections of drawings and prints, the Sibyl's papers help artists to interrogate the limits of their medium.

In "Remembrance and Remediation: Mediating Disability and Literary Tourism in the Romantic Archive," Jessica Roberson discusses the case of deaf and mute poet Sophia Hyatt, who walked the grounds of Byron's Newstead Abbey, recorded her poems on an erasable slate and copied them on paper in the evening. Her work has reached us because her patron, Louisa Wildman, copied them into a commonplace book, which Washington Irving quoted in *The Crayon Miscellany, No. 2: Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* (1835). Roberson discusses Hyatt's "complex embodiment" and her mediated visibility in "the already fragmented and contingent nature of Romantic archives" in relation to the "competing counter-narratives, multiple perspectives and material histories" of disability studies (91).

In "Literary Sampling and the Poetics of the Specimen," David Duff examines Keats's "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem" and other poems alluding to experiments in style—anthological excerpts, but also detached pieces issued with prospectuses to showcase the promise of a prospective publication to subscribers. As separate publications, these samples of the "book to come" functioned as potential "book parts," which were retrospectively stabilized when they became building blocks of published collections (123, 111). However, when the publication plan

did not succeed they constituted a “bibliographic anomaly” as excerpts of “works that do not exist in any other form” (122).

In “Elements of Life: Editing and Arranging the Work of John Hunter,” Tilottama Rajan explores the relationship between Hunter’s textual corpus and his collection of 13,000 anatomical specimens—diseased, desiccated, preserved. Rajan traces a “dialectical circuit” between specimens and writings, evident in Hunter’s “reluctance to publish his works systematically” and the troubled relationship between “observations on bits of paper that his assistants transferred into notebooks,” transcripts, and the various printed editions of his writings (146, 136, 139). Like specimens, loose papers have a mobility that suits the dynamics of knowledge in the making and the productive tension between singularities, whose characteristics tend to disunity, rather than systems of knowledge. Coleridge’s *Theory of Life* (1816–19) documents frustration with the ways in which Hunter’s published medical writings fail to map onto the collection of objects, which offer—in Coleridge’s words—a “more perfect language” than words, despite their seeming lack of logical arrangement (145).

Loose leaves often survive because they were transcribed or pasted into more durable, often bound forms, or because the real or imaginary materiality of the original is mentioned in its published form. Recent work on notebooks, albums, and other ephemera recaptures the complex, miscellaneous, entangled processes of composition, collection, and storage. This attention to material culture seeks to capture the dynamic diversity of Romantic paper archives, reviving the tension between flying leaves and bound books. While print mediates the miscellaneity of fugitive poetry, subsuming the different media and formats in which it first appeared to the uniform bibliographic encoding of collected works, this special issue is an invitation to follow the traces of their fugitive or lost materialities.

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