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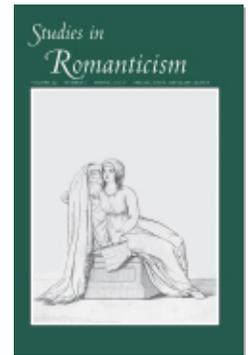
Volatilia: Coleridge, Sibylline Leaves, and Fugitive
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Volatilia: Coleridge, Sibylline Leaves, and Fugitive Knowledge

“THE TRUE SIBYLLINE”

FUGITIVE TEXTS ARE UNCANNY, FAMILIAR–BUT–DIFFERENT, SOMEHOW OUT OF place. Kathleen Coburn described a disbound leaf from Coleridge’s Notebook 3 as a “true sibylline.”¹ The notebook is held at the British Library, while the missing leaf is pasted onto the back cover of the *Wallensteins Tod* manuscript, prepared for Coleridge by Friedrich Schiller and now stored at Harvard. Coburn’s characterization of this fragment demonstrates a moment of bibliographic play in which Coleridge’s own metaphoric of sibylline leaves is posthumously mobilized as a descriptor for the fugitive condition of his writings at large. The assimilation of this displaced fragment within the definitive, chronological edition gestures to a method by which Coleridge himself ranged across media that, by the end of his career, he would describe as a “Wilderness of scraps . . . volatile and fugitive.”²

The “true sibylline” exists in relation to a corollary category that cuts across bibliographic, commercial, poetical, theological, and philosophical contexts: the fugitive. Coleridge articulates the paradox of fugitive poetics early on in *Biographia Literaria*:

I learnt from [my schoolmaster] that Poetry, even that of the loftiest, and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes. In the truly great poets, he would say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word.³

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn et al., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957–2002), 1:xxiii. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as *N*. The “missing” leaf is *f*. 59. See Walter Grossman, “The Gilman–Harvard Manuscript of Schiller’s *Wallensteins Tod*,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 11 (1957): 319–45.

2. Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), 6:970. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as *L*.

3. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

The accretive “more” signals degrees of comparative quality (“more difficult”) and proliferating quantity (“more, and more fugitive causes”). What is at once adamantly precise—attendant upon every single word—commands the ambitiously universalizing scope of logic. In Coleridge’s dynamic metaphysics, there is a direct transparency between reason and the heterogeneous principles and impressions from which it is derived: logic and life are mutually constitutive.⁴ James Engell and W. Jackson Bate note that Coleridge’s remark draws on Edward Young’s “On Lyric Poetry” (1728): “Thus Pindar, who has as much logic at the bottom as Aristotle or Euclid, to some critics has appeared as mad” (*BL*, 1:9n2). But Coleridge’s claim goes much further than suggesting that what seems mad is in fact relatively logical. Instead, poetry is not only *more* difficult, complex, and subtle than science, but its logic is dependent on its madness, on those amorphous and evasive “fugitive causes.”

In 1818–19 Coleridge rearticulated his schoolmaster’s lesson on logic and fugitive causes, this time in the margins of *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* (1787), a work of Old Testament philology written by the Enlightenment theologian J. G. Eichhorn, whom Coleridge met on his trip to Göttingen in 1799.⁵ Eichhorn contrasts implicitly dubious oracular texts with the Bible, the veracity and historicity of which eclipses the power of poetry. In his notes on Eichhorn, Coleridge pictured oracular figures—Daniel, Merlin, Nostradamus, the Sibyls—as “many floating Traditions” that make their way into “Sacred Books” by way of “old fragments” and clandestine pamphlets.⁶ Responding in the margins of Eichhorn’s text, Coleridge rejected his exegetic surrender of poetic “ornament” in these fragmentary materials, and made the same demand of Eichhorn as his schoolmaster had made years before:

Eminently must the Poet have a distinct meaning and reason for every word, he uses: for herein chiefly does Poetry differ from Prose. But a religious, an inspired Poet, and a Commissioned Prophet—that *he* should scatter about flighty fancies, and sentences senseless, is too absurd. (*M*, 2:406)

University Press, 1983), 1:9. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as *BL*.

4. See Frederick Rainsberry, “Coleridge and the Paradox of the Poetic Imperative,” *ELH* 21, no. 2 (1954): 114–45; Tim Milnes, “Coleridge’s Logic,” in *Handbook of the History of Logic*, ed. Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods, vol. 4, *British Logic in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2008), 33–75.

5. See Ina Lipkowitz, “Inspiration and the Poetic Imagination: Samuel Taylor Coleridge,” *Studies in Romanticism* 30, no. 4 (1991): 605–31.

6. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. George Whalley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 2:406. Henceforth cited in the text as *M*.

Coleridge contended that neither poetic lines nor scriptural archives can be mined and hewn in the way that Eichhorn's method demanded. Taken together, Eichhorn's and Coleridge's accounts set up a bibliographic polarity between the "historical book" and scattered fancies, neither of which offer a wholly appropriate model for the mediation of scripture nor of poetry, and both of which are subject to the management (and mismanagement) of "selectors [*sic*] and compilers" (*M*, 2:406).

Fugitive *pieces* are part of a burgeoning eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print genre associated with the republication of ephemeral, occasional, and popular texts.⁷ Various titles "asylums," "gleanings," "cullings," and "joinerianas," collections of fugitive pieces emphasize the acquisitive scope and rehabilitative potential of the codex. The pieces housed in these collections are characterized by their "fugacity," a term that Samuel Johnson defined abstractly as a "volatility; or quality of flying away," an essential characteristic of the sibylline leaf.⁸ Johnson's *Harleian Miscellany*, a collection of broadsides and ballads compiled in the mid-eighteenth century, dramatized the "boundless liberty" and tolerant "multiplicity" of the period, one which rightfully generated endless vindication, opposition, and pamphleteering; the "small tracts" collected in the miscellany encapsulated all the "ardour" and immediacy of controversy and nation-building.⁹ The industrious compiler was thus figured by Johnson as a servant to public interest, collecting together the "papers of the day," remnants and witnesses of popular and political culture otherwise eclipsed by canonical histories. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1802–20) documented a shift from a sense of the fugitive as "witness" to a sense of the fugitive as "a Wanderer or Renegado . . . among the Learned."¹⁰ Fugitive pieces are described in the *Cyclopaedia* as "those little Compositions, on loose Sheets, or half sheets; thus called because [they are] easily lost, and soon forgot": diminutive, contingent, altogether unremarkable.¹¹

By the nineteenth century, the term "fugitive" helped publishers to differentiate between original and republished work. The "Advertisement" for

7. See Paula McDowell, "Of Grubs and Other Insects: Constructing Categories of 'Ephemera' and 'Literature' in Eighteenth-Century British Writing," in *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll (Plymouth, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 31–55.

8. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* [. . .], 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1755).

9. Johnson, "The Introduction," in *The Harleian Miscellany* [. . .] (Dublin: J. Kinneir, 1744), i:iii, ii.

10. Rees, *Cyclopaedia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London, James Knapton: 1819), 15:n.p.

11. Rees, *Cyclopaedia*, 15:n.p.

The Poetical Register of 1812 asked prospective contributors to “write ‘Fugitive’ on such poems as have before appeared in print” (this volume contains Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight,” later printed in *Sibylline Leaves*).¹² In an earlier volume of the *Register* printed in 1807, contributors are warned to send duplicate copies only, as “all rejected contributions are committed to the flames.”¹³ The wayward fugitive treads a risky path, and the threat of destruction looms large over the circulation of fugitives outside of the protective edition. From the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the label “fugitive” shifted from signaling something quintessentially of the moment to something recycled, a poem that a reader has likely seen before or elsewhere. The logic of the fugitive is no longer occasional, but recursive. Thus, the term widens its compass to take in republished and variant versions of all kinds of writing, drawn both from high and popular culture.

The familiar bibliographic category of the *ephemeral* is neither accurate nor expansive enough to describe fugitive texts, which, rather than simply perishable, confront the questions of order, temporality, instability, and mobility. In his preface to an anthology of Greek poetry compiled in 1813, Rev. Robert Bland distinguished between the “masterly characters” of “histories, orations, and nobler poems” and the “private events and domestic occurrences” that populate “fugitive pieces . . . which, like planks of a mighty wreck, help to convey to us some idea of the majesty of the vessel which has gone to pieces.”¹⁴ These epigrams or “minor relics” are companionable texts that operate “beneath the dignity of history”; they gesture beyond themselves to transport readers into an intimate, subterranean world of private custom and festivity. Bland’s wreckage is suggestive of what Thomas MacFarland has described as “diasparactive” (from *diasparaktos*, torn to pieces), a term that he coined to describe a triad of Romantic forms—“incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin— . . . the very centre of life.”¹⁵ More broadly, fugitive pieces might suggest another inflection for this term, this time from *diaspeirein*, to scatter and disperse. “Fugitive knowledge” captures the dual sense of partiality and mobility that conditions the specifically material textuality of Coleridge’s collecting practices as they intersect with his own particular sense of order derived from fragments.

The originating and reproductive modes of the fugitive converge in Coleridge’s own sense of how his works might be collected and organized, how the “majesty” of the whole might be reconciled to the “minor

12. *The Poetical Register and Repository of Fugitive Poetry for 1808–1809* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1812), iv.

13. *Poetical Register*, iv.

14. Bland, *Collections from the Greek Anthology and from the Pastoral, Elegiac and Dramatic Poets of Greece* (London: John Murray, 1813), vii–viii.

15. MacFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 5.

relic” of the part. In what follows, I trace the emergence, reappearance, and reception of the Sibyl through Coleridge’s work. This essay builds on the work of David Fairer, Jon Klancher, and Dahlia Porter, who have each explored the organization and methodization of knowledge in Coleridge’s corpus. I situate *Sibylline Leaves* in what Coleridge called a “critical biblio-biographical history” (*L*, 2:955).¹⁶ I begin with three unfulfilled plans outlined by Coleridge between 1796 and 1812. These manuscript projections suggest a shifting sense of how the poet positioned himself in relation to literary histories and canons, and to other disciplines and media, such as encyclopedias, periodicals, and the popular press. I trace these interests in organization and mediation through to *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816), a sermon that invokes the Sibyl just as the poet’s own *Sibylline Leaves* are in the press. The Sibyl of *The Statesman’s Manual* is derived from the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus, suggesting an alternative philosophical genealogy for fugitive texts. Taking the Heraclitean Sibyl as a source for the title of Coleridge’s *Sibylline Leaves* radically repositions what has often been read as a wry, whimsical, or even incompetent gesture. As an authorizing figure for Coleridge’s newspaper essays, religious writings, and poetry collection, the figure of the Sibyl offers a counterpoint to “self-canonization,” and suggests fresh anxieties, ideals, and interpretative possibilities at work in Coleridge’s compilation and composition practice.¹⁷

History, Miscellany and “Sibylline Leaves of Newspaper Essays”

Poems on Various Subjects (1796) was Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s first effort at collecting his own poetry. “There is no easy progress or sense of developing powers through the volume,” David Fairer writes, “but an unsettling negotiation with its poetic materials—hesitant steps, daring leaps, purposeful strides (and not necessarily in that order) . . . The book was invested in the prospective as much as the achieved.”¹⁸ These two sets of tensions—between method and materials, and between past and future—characterize Coleridge’s persistent and unfulfilled urge to collect, combine, and synthesize his writings into a great work. In 1796, a similar issue arose as Coleridge plotted a history of English poetry on a manuscript sheet now compiled in the enormous Egerton MS 2800, a

16. Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790–1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Porter, *Science, Form, and the Problem of Induction in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

17. Michael Gamer, *Romanticism, Self-Canonization and the Business of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

18. Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, 161.

large album of posthumously bound sheets held at the British Library. The projected history runs:

English Romances
 Chaucer
 Spenser
 English Ballads
 Shakespeare!!!
 Milton!!!
 Dryden
 Modern Poetry.
 . . .
 to conclude with a Philosophical Analysis of Poetry.¹⁹

There is an almost acerbic disparity in Coleridge's use of punctuation, from the exclamations to the incidental inadequacy of ". . ." The headings comprise an assemblage of generic schools, single authors, and periodized groups. Historical poets are disaggregated into authorial units, while contemporary "Modern Poetry" is yoked together on the outskirts of a plan that throws all its emphasis onto an enthusiastic and retrospective canonicity. Coleridge would return to this venture at various times and to various ends throughout his career, eventually superseding this catalogic order with a method that aimed to comprehensively embed "Philosophical Analysis."

Coleridge developed this plan with renewed vigor in 1803, in a series of letters to Robert Southey that make recommendations for a "History of British Literature" or "*Bibliotheca Britannica*" (*L*, 2:955). The letters negotiate a scheme that might become Southey's "grand work," a history comprised of a number of singular biographical treatises dealing with all prominent writers from Chaucer to Sterne, but which would also stretch beyond literary history to include treatises on "metaphysics, theology, medicine, alchemy, common, canon, and Roman law" and a chronological catalog "of all noticeable or extant books" (*L*, 2:955). Its index, completed last, would amount to "a pandect of knowledge, alive and swarming with human life, feeling, incident" (*L*, 2:956); its impetus is inchoate and vital, excited at its own prospect, impelled by possibility and undeterred, at least at first, by impracticality.²⁰ This history of English poetry would range over two volumes, the first half organized—as in 1796—under the heads of great poets, while

19. Coleridge, "Literary, political and miscellaneous remains," 1796–1899, British Library Egerton MS 2800, f. 52.

20. On indexes, see Dennis Duncan, "Indexes," in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 196–204.

the second would include a “history . . . more flowing, more consecutive, more bibliographical, chronological and complete” (*L*, 2:955). The cumulative anaphora pushes this sentence and its ambition to the brink of excess—more, more, more—finally forcing an absolute form (“complete”) into the realms of relativity, as something that might be continually expanded and improved. This superlative plan offers a corrective to conventional encyclopedias—for Coleridge, unreadable (and, as it turned out, unwritable)—by holding the principle of chronology at once close and in high suspicion. He suggested to Southey that singular treatises would proceed by an internal chronology, but the project as a whole would be more thematized, since it required a “bond of connection” stronger than that of time: “Think what strange confusion it will make, if you speak of each book, according to its date, passing from the Epic Poem to a treatment on sore legs” (*L*, 2:963). Instead, Coleridge laid out a plan that might balance the provision of “connected trains of thought” with a “delightful miscellany” (*L*, 2:963). Finally, Coleridge lamented the “strange abuse [which] has been made to the word Encyclopaedia! . . . to call a huge unconnected miscellany of the *omne scibile* [everything knowable], an arrangement determined by the accident of initial letters, an Encyclopaedia, is . . . impudent ignorance” (*L*, 2:956). Soon after, Coleridge declared to Southey that encyclopaedias “appear to me a worthless monster. What Surgeon, or Physician, professed Student of pure or mixed Mathematics, what Chemist, or Architect, would go to an Encyclopaedia for *his* books?” (*L*, 2:963). The cacophonous miscellany is distinguished from the ideal encyclopedia not so much on disciplinary grounds, but by the unresolved questions of organizing principle and “bond[s] of connection.” Southey withdrew from the project not long after its inception, diplomatically edging away from a Coleridgean plan characteristically “too good, too gigantic, too beyond [his] powers.”²¹

“Modern Poetry” might be briefly annexed at the end of a history, but taken on its own terms it is a heterogeneous category that poses a number of problems, many of which became gradually more immediate for Coleridge as he pursued a plan for collecting together his own works. Writing to his publisher John Murray in 1812, Coleridge sketched the “*physiognomy*” of a new two-volume collection that worked to assimilate his fugitive writings within the frame of the more discerning codex: “In the huge cumulus of my Memorandum & common-place Books I have at least two respectable Volumes” (*L*, 3:417). A proposed title page for *Exotics Naturalized* followed:

i.e. impressive Sentiments, Reflections, Aphorisms, Anecdotes, Epigrams, short Tales and eminently beautiful Passages from German,

21. Southey to Coleridge, August 3, 1803, quoted in Henry Duff Triall, *Coleridge* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 103.

Spanish, and Italian Words, of which no English Translations Exist; — the whole collected, translated and arranged by S. T. Coleridge, with the explanatory, critical, and biographical notes and notices by the Collector. (*L*, 3:417)

This epistolary plan represents a half-way house that mediates the “*idea* of the work” and the “Specimen of it as realized.” *Exotics Naturalized* marks a clear departure from the earlier plans of 1796 and 1803 and is instead immediately recognizable as both a contribution to the genre of miscellanies—explicitly emphasizing a sense of individual works as fugitives from the occasion of their composition to their posterity in the collection—and a borrowing from the field of contemporary botany, figuring the collection as a herbarium. Coleridge’s framing recalls Alexander von Humboldt’s essay “Ideas for a Physiognomy of Plants” (1808), which describes the abundance, dispersal, and organization of plant life, and the relationship of these ceaseless and fecund movements to “the history of humanity and . . . culture.”²² Humboldt compares the representational work of the naturalist with that of the “painter’s imitative art of depiction,” and Coleridge affirms this imbrication of scientific and aesthetic worlds by positing his own literary “*physiognomy*.”²³ Contrary to the canonizing work of the history and the disciplinary work of the *Bibliotheca*, the “huge cumulus” of Coleridge’s notebooks conspire to project a printed miscellany in its own image, supplemented by paratextual critical apparatus that might explain and “naturalize” their desultory leaves. Coleridge’s proposed title explicitly registers the processes of assimilation integral to the movement of text from manuscript to print and between disciplines, while also exhibiting a kind of self-fashioning not often associated with his persona: here, he is neither an author nor poet but a “Collector.”

Exotics Naturalized never made its way into print, but readers could find the whole spectrum of “Exotics” represented in Coleridge’s newspaper contributions. Heidi Thomson attributes a relative lack of attention to the publication of Coleridge’s poems in newspapers to the “disposable, short-lived, transient nature of the newspaper. It is a genre that is fundamentally at odds with, even inimical to, the canonical, monumental, and, therefore timeless status we now associate with famous poems.”²⁴ But often, in Coleridge’s work, the two planes of newspaper and book publication converge. For instance, in the inscription on

22. Humboldt, *Views of Nature* [. . .], trans. Mark W. Person, ed. Stephen T. Jackson and Laura Dassow Walls (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 160.

23. Humboldt, *Views*, 163. See also Dometa Wiegand, “Alexander Von Humboldt and Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Intersection of Science and Poetry,” *Coleridge Bulletin* 20 (Winter 2002): 105–113.

24. Thomson, *Coleridge and the Romantic Newspaper: The “Morning Post” and the Road to Dejection* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 6.

the fly-leaf of Coleridge's copy of Richard Field's *On the Church* (1635), where Coleridge writes, beneath the name "Hannah Scollock": "But now this book, once yours, belongs to me / The Morning Post's and the Courier's STC."²⁵ In Coleridge's work, notebook, newspaper, and book and their respective temporalities coalesce, demonstrating some of the ways in which diverse printed forms combine to mediate the exchange of ideas and to galvanize a textual condition that is neither wholly ephemeral nor wholly permanent.

Coleridge turns to the Sibyl to describe his changing relationship to writing for the newspapers. She is first mentioned offhand with little qualification in an intimate notebook entry from January 1804. Describing the "insecurity" and "suspicion" that might prove the "Arsenic" of a love besieged by strangeness, Coleridge wrote: "how differently it would impress me now from the time of my Sibylline Leaves of Newspaper Essays" (*N*, 1:1723). This aside suggests that something in Coleridge's scribal and authorial habits had changed, and figures cognition and affect in relation to paper technologies with little explanation, prompting questions about the relationship between the poet, the notebook entry, and newspaper essay. Coleridge noted that the entry represented a "current of thought" in order that he might later "seek [it] out again and sail down with it" (*N*, 1:1723). This ebullient character is typical of his inconsistent notekeeping practice: for example, Coleridge worked across fourteen notebooks in 1809, while his notebook 3 ½, intended as a workbook for learning German, spans twenty-eight years and includes entries from 1803 right up to 1824.²⁶

The entry quoted above appears in Notebook 16, which Coburn describes as an "unmethodical mixture of interests taken up and apparently dropped" (*N*, 1:xxxix). In Coleridge's words, the notebook is a "Metallic Pencil Pocket-book with Hints, Thoughts, Facts, Illustrations &c &c," comprising a record of his Scottish tour, months at Keswick and return to Grasmere, as well as his travels in Malta (*L*, 2:1031). Coleridge's turn of phrase suggests that there was a "time of," before and after his engagement with the newspaper. This "time" of Coleridge's "Sibylline Leaves of Newspaper Essays" was perhaps 1796, during which Coleridge produced ten issues of his own periodical *The Watchman*, or perhaps between 1797 and 1803, when he wrote prolifically for the *Morning Post* and other London dailies.²⁷ But such a time was not over in 1804. Coleridge crystallized

25. J. C. C. Mays, *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1:918.

26. Paul Cheshire, "Coleridge's Notebooks," in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 289.

27. Angela Esterhammer, "Coleridge in the Newspapers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 165–85.

the relationship between the notebook entry and the periodical essay in his prospectus for *The Friend* in 1809 (revised and extended in 1818):

daily noting down, in my Memorandum or Common-place Books, both Incidents and Observations; whatever had occurred to me from without, and all the Flux and Reflux of my Mind within itself. The Number of these Notices, and their Tendency, miscellaneous as they were to one common End . . . first encouraged me to undertake the Weekly Essay.²⁸

This effort at reconciling “miscellaneous” parts to a “common End” animated Coleridge’s pursuit of a complete edition. Coleridge returned to this notion of “Flux and Reflux” in *The Statesman’s Manual*, the site of his most sustained and direct engagement with sibylline textuality.

Heraclitus, Mediation, and Method: “all in perpetual genesis”

The Statesman’s Manual was the first of Coleridge’s *Lay Sermons*. Ian Balfour describes it as “one version of the elusive encyclopaedic text of which Coleridge often dreamed”—elusive because this project was never completed; encyclopedic in its pairing of political and theological teaching with the “predictions” of “permanent prophecies” and “eternal truths . . . [to] teach the science of the future in its perpetual elements.”²⁹ This ambition of permanence works by curiously fugitive means. On the fly leaves of a copy of *The Statesman’s Manual*, Coleridge wrote that the Appendix to the work “is by far the most miscellaneous and desultory of all my writings. It had a right to be such: for it professes [*sic*] to be nothing more than a maniple or handful of loose flowers, a string of hints and materials for reflection . . . to rouse and stimulate the mind—to set the reader thinking” (*SM*, 114n2). Drawing explicitly on the methods and metaphoric of the poetry anthology, Coleridge argued that the diffuse and digressive structure of the Appendix had an intrinsically didactic value, even more so than could be achieved through “a connected train of proofs and arguments” (*SM*, 114n2); the sermons “tend [to] a common result, [and] cannot justly be regarded as a motley Crew or Patchwork, a farrago of heterogenous Effusions! Even tho’ the form and sequence were more aphorismic and disconnected” (*SM*, 114n2). Thus, as in poetry, logic is predicated on fugitive causes. Coleridge distinguished between the “loose flowers”—rousing and provocative—and

28. Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 2:16.

29. Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 253; *The Statesman’s Manual*, in *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 7–8. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as *SM*.

the “farrago,” implying that there are varying forms and effects of miscellaneity. This same “test,” Coleridge went on to assert, might be applied to all of his most recent published work, including a “Series of Letters on as many different important Subjects and of permanent interest, morally, politically and historically, in the Morning Post and Courier” (*SM*, 114n2). Coleridge’s “Sibylline Leaves of Newspaper Essays” is invoked again, but this time as a constitutive aspect of the poet’s voluminous canon. Through this invocation Coleridge defended his corpus against those reviewers who persistently caricatured him as a “wild and eccentric Genius that has published nothing but fragments & splendid Tirades—” (*SM*, 114n2). Coleridge mounted a defense against this accusation not by distancing his writing from fragmentary forms, but by arguing for the political and theological learning that might be gleaned from this “handful of loose flowers.”

The Statesman’s Manual offers a new context in which to read *Sibylline Leaves* and a particular classical precedent for Coleridge’s “aphorismic and disconnected” method. Half-way through the sermon Coleridge turns to Pagan sources and argues that “the main hindrance to the use of the Scriptures, as your Manual, lies in the notion that you are already acquainted with its contents. Something *new* must be presented to you, wholly new and wholly out of yourselves” (*SM*, 25). This combinatory power of the “union of old and new” grounds Coleridge’s defense of his miscellaneous method. The first of two “great examples” that follow is Heraclitus, himself infamous for fragmentary and aphoristic writing; the second is the Augustan poet Horace (*SM*, 26). Coleridge’s engagement with Heraclitus in *The Statesman’s Manual* is implicitly recuperative and even defensive, positioning the writer of fugitive texts as an exemplary authority. As Adam Roberts points out, Heraclitus is “the first great philosopher of the *logos*, a much-debated principle of ‘order’ or ‘organisation,’” and a theorist of flux and fluidity whose texts are deliberately fugitive—epigrams are always already fragmentary and suggestive.³⁰ According to Coleridge: “in Heraclitus it is all in perpetual Genesis” (*M*, 5:714).³¹ Heraclitus and Horace are “removed from each other by many centuries and not more distant in their ages than in their characters and situations” (*SM*, 26). This temporal distance underpins the logic that Coleridge crystallized in his “Essays on Method,” that “things the most remote and diverse in time, place, and outward circumstance, are brought into mental contiguity and succession,

30. Roberts, “Coleridge’s Classicised Politics,” in *Greek and Roman Classics in the British Struggle for Social Reform*, ed. Henry Stead and Edith Hall (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 51.

31. Quoted in Kathleen Wheeler, “Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination: A Hegelian Solution to Kant?,” in *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism*, ed. David Jasper (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986), 34.

the more *striking* as the less expected.”³² Fugitive knowledge works by creating contiguity from seeming disorder, so that “something *new*” can be brought to bear on “the archives of the Old Testament” (*SM*, 8).

This combinatory power characterizes Coleridge’s invocation of the Sibyl in *The Statesman’s Manual*. R. J. White notes that Coleridge spliced together two fragments from Heraclitus in the sermon, both from Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “Herakleitos,” an article that served as the first comprehensive critical edition of Heraclitus, published in 1807 in the *Museum der Alterthums-Wissenschaft* (*SM*, 25n4). Coleridge reproduced the fragment in ancient Greek followed by a translation in English:

Multiscience (or a variety and quantity of acquired knowledge) does not teach intelligence. But the SIBYLL with wild enthusiastic mouth shrilling forth unmirthful, inornate and unperfumed truths reaches to a thousand years with her voice through the power of God. (*SM*, 26)³³

Later, Coleridge wrote that this was “one of the few genuine fragments” from Heraclitus and one in which the Sibyl is “so magnificently characterised” (*M*, 6:5). The characterization hinges on the particularly “consubstantial” function the Sibyl serves: both the Sibyl and the text are “the living *educts* of the Imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason . . . of which they are the conductors” (*SM*, 29).³⁴ This reconciliation of seeming opposites—wild and divine truths—is typical of Heraclitean polarity. In *The Friend*, Coleridge wrote: “Every Power in Nature and in Spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifestation . . . This is the universal Law of Polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated by Heraclitus.”³⁵ It is this dialectical polarity that characterizes the uniquely chiasmatic temporality of scripture in *The Statesman’s Manual*: “the Sacred History becomes prophetic, the Sacred Prophecies historical” (*SM*, 29). Scripture is both “temporary” and “perpetual”; the “portrait” and the “ideal” (*SM*, 30). Toward the end of *The Statesman’s Manual*, Coleridge invokes the underworld of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, a scene often brought to bear on *Sibylline Leaves*: “But alas! the halls of old philosophy have been so long deserted that we circle them at a shy distance as the haunt of Phantoms and Chimeras. The sacred Grove of Academus

32. Coleridge, “Essays on the Principles of Method,” in *The Friend*, 2:455.

33. See Emily Pillinger, *Cassandra and the Poetics of Prophecy in Greek and Latin Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 166.

34. See also Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99–133.

35. Coleridge, *The Friend*, 2:479.

is held in like regard with the unfoodful trees in the shadowy world of Maro [Virgil] that had a dream attached to every leaf" (*SM*, 43). Sibylline leaves—unripe and oneiric—come to represent the neglected halls of philosophy. In this way, taking the Heraclitean Sibyl as the "portrait and ideal" for *Sibylline Leaves* belies the caricature of the collection as an assemblage of scraps and patches, madness without method, and instead suggests an alternative genealogy for fragmentary, fugitive pieces and a more dynamic relationship between order, mediation, and flux.

Following close on the tail of the *Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge began to hone his thinking on mediation as he drafted his controversial introduction for the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* (1818). Buoyed by the vatic tradition of the Sibyl, Coleridge hoped that his encyclopedia might similarly "collect and combine the rich but scattered elements of future science."³⁶ The epigraph to the *Metropolitana's* Prospectus is another of Coleridge's spliced excerpts in Ancient Greek—Plato's *Parmenides* with an interloping phrase from Aristotle marked below in brackets—which H. N. Fowler translates as:

Because before the beginning another beginning always appears; and after the end a further end remains; <some things are lacking and some in excess>. The whole must, it seems to me, be broken up into small fractions. Must not things also appear to be in contact with one another and separated, and in every sort of motion and in every sort of rest, and coming into being and perishing, and neither of the two, if the many exist and the one does not. (577–78)

The interminable temporality of the encyclopedia, volume after volume, is—to borrow from an essay in the *Monthly Magazine*—a project that presents a "thousand little beginnings that tread the heels of the safest conclusion . . . [where] there is no getting at the last of our never-ending, still-beginning language."³⁷ Unfortunately for Coleridge, greatly in need of money and frustrated by the interventions of his publisher, his plan for the arrangement of the *Metropolitana* would never come to fruition. It was not the scope of the work that caused disagreements, but precisely its method and its particular use of miscellaneity. Coleridge intended the work to be comprised of eight "divisions" that were quickly reduced to four by his editors (initially the Reverend Thomas Curtis and the philologist John

36. Coleridge, "Prospectus to the Encyclopaedia Metropolitana," in *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1:587. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as *P*.

37. "The Last Book: With a Dissertation of Last Things in General," *Monthly Magazine, or British Register of Literature, Sciences, and the Belles-Lettres*, 2 (July–December 1826), 137.

Stoddart). This new arrangement elided what Coleridge conceived of as the “Middle Method”—the fine arts and poetry—the mediating link between the two contrary poles of ideal and experiential knowledge. The publishers also proposed to publish installments from each of the four parts simultaneously, destroying any possibility that a reader might establish the foundations of knowledge before moving on organically: “Multiscience” without method. Coleridge lamented that his plan had been “so bedevilled, so interpolated, and topsy-turvied,” so “egregiously mutilated,” and soon denounced the whole project as “*an infamous catch-penny*,” “most worthless,” “most dishonest” (*L*, 4:725). Having felt that his manuscript had been “extorted” from him and unfairly attributed to Stoddart, it was eventually returned by his incensed editors “cut up into snips so as to make it almost useless” (*L*, 4:725). This fate is accompanied, nevertheless, by Coleridgean delusions of grandeur: “Had the *Paradise Lost* been presented to [John Stoddart], he would have given the same opinion, & pulled it piecemeal & rejoined it in the same manner” (*L*, 4:821). Coleridge’s earlier protestation to Southey in 1803 that encyclopedias “cannot [be] read” thus gains a sharp prophetic edge.

“Unity from Multeity”

In the opening lines of *Sibylline Leaves*’s short preface, Coleridge acknowledged the fugitive nature of the book’s contents: “The following collection has been entitled *Sibylline Leaves*, in allusion to the fragmentary and widely scattered state in which they have been long suffered to remain.”³⁸ Contemporary reviewers expected a publication practice that represented a cumulative growth from quarto to octavo to “well-seasoned edition, reappeared, like an old friend with a new face, with sundry fresh title-pages.”³⁹ Instead, the poet

[c]ompresses matter enough for a handsome volume into a two-penny pamphlet; then he lets a friend bury his jewels in a heap of sand of his own; then he scatters his “*Sibylline Leaves*” over a half a hundred perishable news-papers and magazines; then he suffers a manuscript poem to be handed about among his friends till all its bloom is brushed off.⁴⁰

Coleridge’s writings—buried, scattered, and suffered into being—can neither be properly known nor properly familiar, much unlike our “old

38. Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves* (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), i.

39. Unsigned review of *Sibylline Leaves*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal*, *Enlarged* 88 (January 1819), 25.

40. Unsigned review, *The Monthly Review*, 25.

friend,” the book: the “*Exotics*” have not been “naturalized.”⁴¹ The review figures newspaper publication and manuscript circulation among friends as the harbinger of alienation, rather than intimacy or popularity. Published in 1819, the review’s depiction of bibliographic sociability directly inverts the eighteenth-century sense of politeness “owing to Liberty”—a century earlier, Shaftesbury had described sociability as a process by which people “polish one another, and rub off [their] Corners and rough Sides by a sort of *amicable Collision*.”⁴² By contrast, Coleridge’s *Monthly* reviewer depicts a kind of careless erosion of the fugitive text: the further it travels, the more its “bloom” is dulled. The hermetic and “well-seasoned edition” is implicitly mature and erudite; it serves a disciplinary function as it organizes and establishes a poet’s works within proper bounds. David Simpson considers the reception of Shaftesbury’s metaphor in relation to Coleridge’s and Southey’s “idealist schemes” for a Pantisocracy. The language of “amicable collision” had retained a place in articulations of early nineteenth-century sociability, “but it seems increasingly out of place and out of time, a utopian gesture that is more and more hemmed in by the complexities of dealing with truly strange strangers.”⁴³ Not quite an “old friend,” Coleridge’s *Sibylline Leaves*—his first and only tentatively complete collection—is itself a “strange stranger,” a slim volume comprised of fugitive texts gathered under the auspices of the enigmatic Sibyl.

An unsigned review in the *Literary Gazette* followed close on the tail of *Sibylline Leaves*’s publication and set the tone for other responses. This reviewer turned to “our Dictionary”—in this case, Samuel Johnson’s—to gloss “Sibylline” as “of or belonging to a prophetess”:

The word cannot therefore, we hope, be appropriated by Mr Coleridge, who is not so humble a poet as to assume, voluntarily, the character of an old woman. But on refreshing our classic memory we grasp the very essence and soul of this mysterious title. The Sibyl wrote her prophecies on leaves; so does Mr. Coleridge his verses—the prophecies of the Sibyl became incomprehensible, if not instantly gathered; so does the sense of Mr. Coleridge’s poetry; the Sibyl asked the same price from Tarquin for her books when in 9, 6 and 3 volumes; so does Mr. Coleridge for his, when scattered over sundry publications, and now as collected into one—as

41. Unsigned review, *The Monthly Review*, 25.

42. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London, 1711), 1:64.

43. Simpson, *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 8.

soon as the Sibyl had concluded the bargain she vanished . . . the Sibylline books were preserved by Kings . . . even so does Mr. Coleridge look to delight Monarchs.⁴⁴

For this sardonic reviewer, the title presented a bathetic “stumbling block” at the book’s “threshold,” a “recondite enigma” that forced “time pressed Critics” to turn to the classics before they could turn to the poetry. This has remained the case in Coleridge scholarship: Gary Dyer reads the title in relation to the “discontinuous history of the Sibylline Books that guided Rome’s leaders” and the controversial *Oracula Sibyllina*, gathered by a sixth-century editor, first published in 1545 and translated into English in 1713.⁴⁵ Chris Murray focuses on the sibyl’s epic associations and argues that “Coleridge’s allusion to Virgil identifies him with the ancient oracles . . . The reader too is flattered by the part of the questing Aeneas.”⁴⁶ Yet the Sibyl remains on the margins of scholarship on prophecy perhaps because, as Ian Balfour argues, “Prophecy is almost invariably a male (and masculine) phenomenon . . . [By contrast,] the sibyls of classical literature are shadowy figures of legend rather than authors whose writings one can now read.”⁴⁷ Samantha Webb contends that in the nineteenth century the sibyl’s leaves were evoked as relics valuable for their curious, antiquarian rarity, but that their prophetic and political authority had much diminished.⁴⁸ As implicitly promiscuous scraps circulated outside the purview of an authoritative edition, the Sibyl served as fodder for the chauvinistic feminization of textual transmission and for charges of obfuscation. What are we to make, then, of Coleridge’s co-option of this figure throughout his career? These issues of legibility, posterity, and relationality persist in Coleridge’s own thinking about his oeuvre, but Balfour’s relegation of the Sibyls to the shadowy sidelines of literary history belies the extent to which their legacy galvanizes literary self-fashioning and textual production. Neil Fraistat has argued that “to piece together the scattered leaves of the Sibyl is to discover the contents of a prophecy . . . to build a poetic whole from disparate ‘fragments’ . . . a kind of ‘unity from multiteity.’”⁴⁹ In the Sibyl’s literary history—and in Coleridge’s efforts at organizing and

44. “Sibylline Leaves, a Collection of Poems; by S. T. Coleridge, Esq.,” *The Literary Gazette: Journal of Belles Lettres, Politics and Fashion* 27 (July 26, 1817), 49.

45. Dyer, “Unwitnessed by Answering Deeds: ‘The Destiny of Nations’ and Coleridge’s Sibylline Leaves,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1989), 151.

46. Murray, *Tragic Coleridge* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 80.

47. Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 287n2.

48. Webb, “Reading the End of the World: *The Last Man*, History, and the Agency of Romantic Authorship,” in *Mary Shelley in Her Time*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Johns Hopkins University Press: 2000), 132.

49. Fraistat, *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 20.

methodizing his work—this paradigmatic relation between the part and the whole is complicated by a fractious relationship to time that disturbs an otherwise intuitive *telos* from scattered to gathered, provisional to authoritative, partial to complete.

For Virgil, the Sibyl's leaves were not the "leaves" of a book, as Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass remind us, "for the simple reason that the 'books' he read and on which his own poem was preserved were scrolls."⁵⁰ The word "*folium*," or "leaf," took on new meaning as the page of a book in the fourth century CE, a moment that Chartier and Stallybrass, focusing on Book III of the *Aeneid*, cast as a fulcrum that gives the Sibyl's story new life: her leaves are reinterpreted as constituent elements of the nascent codex. As Coleridge's "Sibylline Leaves of Newspaper Essays" attest, the eighteenth century witnessed another hermeneutic pivot whereby the Sibyl's flying leaves came to be associated with the ephemeral, fugitive qualities of newspapers and other fugitive papers that existed in tension with the codex just as they formed its constituent elements. Moreover, the Sibyl's reappearance in Book VI of the *Aeneid* complicates the connection between the leaves and "new forms of the book" by cautioning against writing itself:

But, oh! Commit not thy prophetic Mind
To flitting Leaves, the sport of every Wind:
Lest they disperse in Air our empty Fate:
Write not, but, what the Pow'rs ordain, relate.⁵¹

There is a paradigmatic tension here between the promise of commitment, the threat of dispersal, and the power of relation. While the "liquid Air" threatened to scatter and disturb the prophecies in Book III, in Book VI the Sibyl's voice commands such pressure that the "resisting Air" breaks into thunder, amplifying her fury and shaking the cave in which her interlocutors stand. The airs that were previously a threat to the prophecies' coherence become a constitutive element of their mediation and transmission. This shift from scribal to oral commands a force that enlivens expression by more closely embedding the message in the medium. The Sibyl of Book VI and the imperative to "relate" brings the "wild enthusiastic mouth" of the Heraclitean Sibyl more strikingly into view and confirms the Sibyl's unique usefulness as an authorizing figure for textual mediation.

50. Chartier and Stallybrass, "What is a Book?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 194.

51. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, in *The Works of Virgil containing his Pastorals, Georgics and Aeneis*, trans. John Dryden, 2nd ed. (London: Tonson, 1698), 415.

Coleridge made a return to Heraclitus in March 1824, when he encountered John Smith's *Select Discourses* (1660) for the second of at least three times. In the section titled "Of Prophecy," Smith considers the distinctions between the "prophetical and the pseudo-prophetical spirit," the one characterized by "reason, strength, and solidity of judgement," while the other resides in man's "fancy," where it "dwells as in storms and tempests."⁵² The latter spirit, Smith argues, works by "alienating" prophets from their own minds, as in a fury or melancholy, and is embodied in the Pythian prophetess, Cassandra, and the Sibyl as described by Heraclitus "as one speaking ridiculous and unseemly speeches with her furious mouth."⁵³ Coleridge corrects a small inaccuracy in Smith's transliteration and renders the passage in verse:

—Inornate Lays not redolent of Art, To win sense with flowers
of Rhetoric, Lip-blossoms breathing perishable sweets—
Yet by the power of the informing WORD
~~Roll They onward thro' a~~
Roll sounding onward thro' a thousand years
Their deep prophetic Bodingsements.
στοματι μαινομενψ = With ecstatic mouth. (*M*, 5:84)

This re-reading of Heraclitus's Sibyl comprises a kind of poetic rehabilitation more tempting than tempestuous. Unlike Virgil's representation of flitting leaves disturbed by the wind, for Heraclitus the Sibyl's blossoms are themselves "breathing." In her reading of "Frost at Midnight," Marjorie Levinson numbers the Sibylline leaf among an array of "physical analogies for the writerly text"—contingent and perishable—but if we widen our sphere of reference we find that the Sibyl engages modes of expression more closely associated with the oral and fugitive—"sounding" rather than writing.⁵⁴ The sibylline ecology of "lip-blossom" and the leaf pushes the recursive logic of fugitive knowledge to its revelatory limits.

As Coleridge's career progressed, he became increasingly aware of the relationship between oral transmission and his "Manifold Many-Scraps on Many Scrips in [his] own Manuscript, alias Manuscrawl" (*L*, 6:676). In 1825, he sent his nephew Edward a "bag of single scraps," instructing him to "read . . . *dramatically*—ie. As the portrait and impress of the mood and the moment—birds of passages—or Bubbles"

52. Smith, *Select Discourses* (Cambridge: John Hayes, 1673), 190.

53. Smith, *Select Discourses*, 190.

54. Levinson, *Thinking Through Poetry: Field Reports on Romantic Lyric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 228.

(*L*, 5:493). The ephemerality of these “scraps” is characterized by flight, effervescence, and fugacity. In the summer of 1826, Coleridge began a letter to Edward with an animated scene of composition and reclamation that lilts from discovery to departure and from permissiveness to yearning as it transcribes a fugitive piece too fragile to withstand the post (it materialized in print as part of “On the Constitution of the Church and State” in 1829):

In emptying a Drawer of under-stockings, Rose-leaf Bags, old (but too many of them!) unopened Letters, and Paper-scraps or Brain Fritters, I had my attention directed to a sere and ragged half-sheet by a gust of wind, which had separated it from its companions and whisked it out of the window into the Garden. Not that I went after it. I have too much respect for the numerous tribe to which it belonged, to lay any restraint on their movements, or to put the vagrant act in force against them. . . . I had been meditating a letter to you —& as I ran my eye over this fly-away Tag-rag and Bob-tail, and bethought me that it was a By-blow of my own, I felt a sort of fatherly remorse and yearning towards it. (*L*, 6:593)

This scene of composition is not one of consolidation or synthesis but of aleatory resignation; it fizzes with the romance of the idea that almost got away, and the affected nonchalance of the great poet who sequesters his “Brain-Fritters” with his “under-stockings.” By the end of his career, the fugitive galvanized Coleridge’s composition as much as his compilation practices. By 1833, just a year before his death, Coleridge found himself “heartless” amidst his “wilderness of Scraps, and Booklets little better, or less volatile & fugitive” (*L*, 6:970). These scrips and scraps were efficacious and ebullient; the “true sibylline.” And so it was that this “scrapster” would refer to his notebooks as “Fly-Catchers,” and, in 1827, title Notebook 56 “Volatilia or Day-book for bird-liming stray small Thoughts, impounding Stray thoughts, and holding Trial for doubtful Thoughts” (*N*, 5:xlix), figuring the process of note-taking as a mode of bibliographic apprehension.⁵⁵ In 1832, Coleridge went so far as to craft a poem imagining an “Autograph on an Auto-pergamene” (*L*, 6:927) or self-skin, a would-be literal exfoliation that parodies the genre of collectible autograph poems, the shedding of leaves, and the peeling of the poet’s skin resulting from treatment for rheumatism.⁵⁶ *Sibylline Leaves*

55. See Jillian M. Hess, “Coleridge’s Fly-Catchers: Adapting Common-place Book Form,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 3 (2012), 463–83.

56. See Jeremy Davies, *Bodily Pain in Romantic Literature* (Routledge: London, 2014), 98. Thanks to Adriana Craciun for suggesting Coleridge’s “Auto-pergamene” as an instance of imagined ex-foliation.

was a public gesture towards the fugacious materialities of manuscripts, miscellanies, and periodicals, a textual condition materialized under the auspices of the Sibyl.

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