

Coleridge's Scotland

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It has often been remarked that, once you start looking, you find that most things in Scottish culture come in pairs or doubles, usually antagonistic: Jekyll and Hyde would be only the most sensational example; and Coleridge's Scotland is no exception. So I should start by distinguishing them: between Coleridge's response to Scotland as a place—a landscape, an imaginative space, and a place to tour—and his response to Scotland as a state of mind: to *Scottishness*, that is to say, an attribute, or rather a defect, of the human intelligence. A Scot like Burns was a great poetic hero, and (as I'll be saying later) he remained one of Coleridge's regular touchstones for a kind of natural poetic excellence; but the trouble was there were very *few* Scots like Burns. The other Scots that Coleridge met, and thought about, sometimes obsessively, reflected (to him) quite a different kind of northern mind, in fact almost the opposite: not the natural, unsophisticated imagination of the Borders or Highlands, but the sceptical Enlightenment secularism of Edinburgh, home of David Hume and the *Edinburgh Review*. The Scottish capital encapsulated in a neat symbol everything that Coleridge most deplored about his age, which amounted (it is not too much to say) to a kind of modern Paganism; and here the important representative figures are people like Francis Jeffrey, and Sir James Mackintosh. They were not on his mind as he completed his extraordinary tour in 1803; but the sort of themes and issues at stake in his condemnation of them were certainly stirring. The time of his Scottish tour, the late Summer of 1803, is a very important time in Coleridge's life: his health, his darkening thoughts about his own poethood, his relationship with Wordsworth—all these were coming to a kind of crisis; and Scotland, in one of its Coleridgean forms or the other (Scotland the natural landscape, or Scotland the state of mind), acted as one focus, among others, for his various interrelated crises. (Everything in Coleridge is related to everything else, as L.C. Knights once said, and that includes his crises.)

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First the real Scotland: the place. As I've already said, Coleridge's only visit happened in the late Summer and early Autumn of 1803, between the middle of August and the middle of September. If going to Germany in 1798 was a Coleridgean expedition, in which the Wordsworths got caught up, then the Scottish tour of 1803 was a Wordsworthian one, and Coleridge quickly had enough of it. Wordsworth had been keen to tour in Scotland for a long time: in fact, were this talk about *Wordsworth* and Scotland, we might be here all day, so strong and abiding was his fascination with the place. Growing up in Cockermouth made Carlisle and the Border country as inevitable a landscape

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for the young Wordsworth as the more Southerly Fells, only later his home and inspiration. He later recalled, as a schoolboy, climbing the Border Beacon and 'looking wistfully toward Scotland';^[1] and, in middle age, wrote in a letter that,

since the days of childhood, when I became familiar with the phrase, "They are killing geese in Scotland and sending the feathers to England" (which every one had ready when the snow began to fall), and when I used to hear, in the time of a high wind, that

Arthur's bower has broken his band,
And he comes roaring up the land;
King o' Scots wi' a' his power
Cannot turn Arthur's bower,

I have been indebted to the North for more than I shall ever be able to acknowledge.^[2]

For all his sense of its romance, Wordsworth's first visit to Scotland was not till 1801, a trip of ten days or so when Basil Montagu got married; he went to Glasgow and visited Cora Linn (the Falls of the Clyde), and returned home via Hamilton and Ecclefechan.^[3] The visit evidently whetted his appetite, and plans for a longer, six-week excursion finally came to realisation in the summer of 1803. Wordsworth seems to have sought advice from Richard Sharp (who had toured Scotland in 1801) for the itinerary of this longer trip, although the party clearly improvised its own route some of the time.^[4] Wordsworth wrote to Sharp in the spring of 1804 to thank him for 'a world of pleasure in our Scotch Tour'.^[5]

Coleridge did not look forward to the trip with unmixed pleasure: he was unhappily in love with Sara Hutchinson (thoughts of her would come to him on the tour: *CN*, i.1451) besides being ill that summer, and depressed that his plans for work had come to nothing: 'I am weary & ashamed of talking about my intended works', he told Southey (*CL*, ii.943). He was seriously planning a stay in Spain to rescue his health (*ibid.*); in May, he took out life insurance to provide for his wife and children should he die. In July, he was still writing to Southey, 'If I go into Scotland ...' (*CL*, ii.955); but by the last week of the month, he was busy trying to negotiate with one Nathaniel Moore for a 'Jaunting Car' to carry the party north. Negotiations proceeded in a typically

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Coleridgean, or perhaps Micawberish fashion:

Mr Moore has sent me a Letter which makes it scarcely possible for me to buy the Jaunting Car under 15£. He expresses the utmost sorrow, that his finances relatively even to mine would make it unjust and pusillanimous in him to give way to his habitual Feelings, which would impel him to insist on my accepting it—that he had repeatedly refused 15£—but that I might deduct from that what I chose ... I begin to find that a Horse & Jaunting Car is *an anxiety*—& almost to wish that we had adopted our first thought, & *walked*: with one pony & side saddle for our Sister Gift-of-God (*CL*, ii.957-8)

—that last a high-spirited pun on 'Dorothea', the female form of 'Theodore'. A few days later, Coleridge manages one of his paradoxically eloquent letters to Southey lamenting his habitual 'sense of weakness—a haunting sense that I was an herbaceous Plant, as large as a large Tree, with a Trunk of the same Girth, & Branches as large & shadowing—but with *pith within* the Trunk, not heart of Wood'; but he is expecting to go North, 'If no strange Accident intervene' anyway (*CL*, ii.959, 960). A week later, a downturn in his health seemed to have provided just

such an accident: 'I am not even certain whether I shall not be forced to put off my Scotch tour', he told Southey (*CL*, ii.963); and a few days later still, he communicated to Sir George and Lady Beaumont his self-diagnosis: 'I have now no doubt that my Complaint is *atonic Gout*—& tho' the excitement & exercise, which the Journey will afford, would be of service to me, yet the chance of Rainy Weather & damp Beds is a very serious Business' (*CL*, ii.965). He was still toying with quite a different plan: to save his health by transplanting himself to Malta, or possibly to Madeira, which would (he said) cost much the same as would the Scottish tour. Moving to Malta is, of course, just what he did, nine months later; but for the time being, Britain was given one more chance; and after mulling over what to do on Saturday, 13 August, he made up his mind to go with the Wordsworths. It seems quite mad, him being so ill; but advanced medical opinion held that physical exertion was the very thing for gout sufferers: it encouraged the bad humours to the extremities, and thence out of the body altogether.^[6] Coleridge consulted with one Edmondson, a neighbour whose medical advice he appealed to in several letters, so perhaps he was a doctor. Gout was thought to be the result of an imbalance in the body's chemistry of humours; and the medicine Edmondson proposed, along with the natural physical jerks of touring, would (he thought) work to dilute and relax the gross humours that were causing Coleridge's troubles. Coleridge reported Edmondson's judgment: 'He is confident—O that I were—that by the use of Carminative Bitters I may get rid of this truly poisonous, & body-&-soul-benumbing Flatulence and

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Inflation: & that if I can only get on, the Exercise & the Excitement will be of so much service as to outweigh the chances of Injury from Wet or Cold. I will therefore go: tho' I never commenced a Journey with such inauspicious Heaviness of Heart before. We—Wordsworth, Dorothy, and myself—leave Keswick tomorrow morning' (*CL*, i.974-5). Not only was Coleridge desperate about his stomach; he was also waking most nights from terrible nightmares—what he called 'frightful Dreams & Hypochondriacal Delusions' (*CL*, ii.974), which he took to be symptoms of the same pathological condition. And, as though that were not enough, his relationship with Wordsworth was beginning to grow more and more fraught, as his own sense of failure and inadequacy, and his futile obsession with Asra, drew him to perceive in Wordsworth an antithesis to his own needy self that could appear monstrously achieving: self-resolved and autonomous, productive and strong, devotedly attended by a house-full of women, and happily married to a Hutchinson. 'I trembled', Coleridge would soon recall, 'lest a Film should rise, and thicken on his moral Eye', a cataract provoked by his constitutional 'Self-involution' (*CL*, ii.1013).

So the prospects for an effortless holiday were hardly rosy. Still, they'd managed to secure the Jaunting Car, which, as Sara told Southey, Wordsworth was to drive the whole way, 'for poor Samuel is too weak to undertake the fatigue of driving' (*CL*, ii.975, n.). They must have made quite a sight: 'We have bought a stout Horse', Coleridge reported to Southey, 'aged but stout & spirited—& an open vehicle, called a Jaunting Car—there is room in it for 3 on each side, on hanging seats—a Dicky Box for the Driver / & a space or hollow in the middle, for luggage—or two or three Bairns.—It is like half a long Coach, only those in the one seat sit with their *back* to those in the other / instead of face to face.—Your feet are not above a foot—scarcely so much—from the ground / so that you may get off & on while the Horse is moving without the least Danger' (*CL*, ii.975); which sounds keen enough about a new gadget. In his notebook he recorded the price of horse and car: £1, 2 and 12; and £10 (*CN*, i.1424).

And so, on 15 August, at twenty past eleven, they set off for Scotland, heading first for Threlkeld: a hot day, according to Dorothy's journal, and the horse played up; but they reached an inn at Hesketh Newmarket for the night, where Coleridge's room struck him, as he said to the notebook, in a blithe little allegory, as 'Cleanliness quarreling with Tobacco Ghosts' (*CN*, i.1426).

They took an evening walk to the nearby Falls at Caldbeck; Coleridge had been here three years before, and now took the opportunity to add to his notebook some supplementary observations, pleased to find another instance of opposites meeting: 'What a self-same Thing a waterfall if you like / if you look at it stedfastly, what fits & starts & convulsive Twitches of Motion' (CN, i.1426). (Something like the moving coincidence of opposites in Wordsworth's 'stationary blasts of water-falls' (*Prelude*, VI, l.558).) As we shall see, Coleridge was to spend much of the next month looking stedfastly, and seeking to write up and remember what he saw: it is one of the great periods of his notebook descriptive writing, an unofficial and informal mini-epic of the attentive eye.

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They pressed on the next day, arriving at Carlisle, where the celebrated public drama of Mary of Buttermere was coming to a close, as Hatfield her seducer was condemned that day. Coleridge made everyone in the court jump by shouting across the hall to Wordsworth, '*Dinner!*'; and later he interviewed Hatfield, spurred on by a curious Dorothy. He writes in the notebook, 'It is not by mere Thought, I can understand this man' (CN, i.1432), as though mulling over the imaginative capacity he had written about just over a year before: 'to *think* ourselves in to the Thoughts and Feelings of Beings in circumstances wholly & strangely different from our own / hoc labor, hoc opus / and who has atchieved [*sic*] it? Perhaps only Shakespere' (CL, ii.810). The touring party walked on the old city walls; they spent the night at Longtown; and on the Wednesday finally crossed the border. Coleridge's first impressions of the landscape around Gretna were not very inspiring: 'a good number of Trees—but yet all so dreary'. A pub, inappropriately named the *Hope*, served no beer: 'What then? Whisky, Gin, and Rum—cries a pale squalid Girl at the Door, a true Offspring of Whiskey-Gin-&-Rum drinking Parents' (CN, i.1433).

The next night they spent in Dumfries; they discovered in the morning that the poet Rogers and his sister were staying there as well: not good news for Coleridge, who had endured a visit from them in Keswick a few days previously, just before setting off for Scotland: 'the envy, the jealousy, & the other miserable Passions, that have made their Pandaemonium in the crazy Hovel of that poor Man's heart' (CL, ii.964). The Wordsworths went off to search out Burns's grave and cottage; Mrs Burns was away at the seaside. Coleridge didn't go, and made some oblique remarks in the notebook about a personality that needed 'kindness & stateliness & gentlemanly Dignity' (CN, i.1435), so it seems that relations with Wordsworth were already beginning to fray: he was certainly irritated by Wordsworth's respectful attentions to Rogers (CN, i.1434). They stayed at an inhospitable inn at Brownhill, which Coleridge didn't much like; and after dinner, rather than walking with the Wordsworths, he went to bed, reflecting (he told the notebook) 'how little there was in this World that could compensate for the loss or diminishment of the Love of such as truly love us / and what bad Calculators Vanity & Selfishness prove to be in the long Run' (CN, i.1436). Off on their walk, meanwhile, the Wordsworths were talking about 'Coleridge's children and family' (DWJ, i.202); Coleridge may well have felt himself surrounded by a Wordsworthian atmosphere of moral reproach, which would hardly have improved his mood.

The next day they passed the Duke of Queensberry's mansion near Thornhill; Dorothy noted that though 'indeed very large ... to us it appeared like a gathering together of little things' (DWJ, i.203), which sounds a very Coleridgean remark, and perhaps a sign of lightening spirits. 'We now felt indeed that we were in Scotland', says Dorothy in her journal, and goes on to record one of the more famous encounters of the tour:

Our road turned to the right, and we saw, at the distance of less than a mile, a tall upright building of grey stone, with several men standing

upon the roof, as if they were looking out over battlements. It stood beyond the village, upon higher ground, as if presiding over it,—a kind of enchanter's castle, which it might have been, a place where Don Quixote would have gloried in. When we drew nearer we saw, coming out of the side of the building, a large machine or lever, in appearance like a great forge-hammer, as we supposed for raising water out of the mines. It heaved upwards once in half a minute with a slow motion, and seemed to rest to take breath at the bottom, its motion being accompanied with a sound between a groan and 'jike'. There would have been something in this object very striking in any place, as it was impossible not to invest the machine with some faculty of intellect; it seemed to have made the first step from brute matter to life and purpose, showing its progress by great power. William made a remark to this effect, and Coleridge observed that it was like a giant with one idea. (*DWJ*, i.207-8)

He enjoyed the thought: it would later reappear as his description of Thomas Clarkson the slave campaigner.^[7]

They stayed at Leadhills that night, the nineteenth; where Coleridge again remained behind in the inn, while the Wordsworths went off to find the Falls of the Clyde. The next day Coleridge joined them on the excursion, passing through Robert Owen's industrial community at New Lanark; the scene inspired Coleridge to a fine passage of patient attention in the notebook, showing his own, peculiarly animated, vividly present-tensed ('As I write this...'), reworking of the eighteenth-century categories, the picturesque and the sublime:

overhanging the Wall-rock are three firs which had a very fine effect / first they made a new feature, and a striking one, secondly their straightness & tallness gave perhaps some dim association of the human form, at least, they did certainly impress on my mind a distinct breezelet of Fear / & lastly, the Trees with which this whole semicircle of wall-rock is crowned, are so various, that this variety acted upon you without acting so obtrusively as to offend / — O that I had seen this in the evening a thumb's breadth from Sunset, the solemn motion of the Trees, is on such nights harmonious with the dimmer shape & deeper colour.—

As I write this, I turn my head, & close by me I see a Birch, so placed as among a number of Trees it alone is in full sunshine, & the Shadows of its Leaves playing on its silver Bark, an image that delighted my Boyhood, when I had no waterfalls to see... (CN, i.1449)

The anticipation of Hopkins's hymns, in poetry and prose, to the multiform loveliness of pied beauty is wonderful ('Elm-leaves:—they shine much in the

sun—bright green when near from underneath but higher up they look olive ... they chip the sky, and where their waved edge turns downwards they gleam and blaze like an underlip sometimes will when seen against the light'^[8]). Coleridge's vision draws on an entire history of looking (which Hopkins would certainly have known); for he is revisiting the descriptive pleasures of 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison':

Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd
Much that has sooth'd me. Pale beneath the blaze

Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above
Dappling its sunshine!

Dorothy's journal records another Coleridgean encounter with eighteenth-century aesthetic categories:

We sat upon a bench, placed for the sake of one of these views, whence we looked down upon the waterfall, and over the open country, and saw a ruined tower, called Wallace's Tower, which stands at a very little distance from the fall, and is an interesting object. A lady and gentleman, more expeditious tourists than ourselves, came to the spot; they left us at the seat, and we found them again at another station above the Falls. Coleridge, who is always good-natured enough to enter into conversation with anybody whom he meets in his way, began to talk with the gentleman, who observed that it was a *majestic* waterfall. Coleridge was delighted with the accuracy of the epithet, particularly as he had been settling in his own mind the precise meaning of the words grand, majestic, sublime, etc., and had discussed the subject with William at some length the day before. 'Yes, sir,' says Coleridge, 'it *is* a majestic waterfall.' 'Sublime and beautiful,' replied his friend. Poor Coleridge could make no answer, and, not very desirous to continue the conversation, came to us and related the story, laughing heartily. (*DWJ*, i.223-4)

Coleridge was to get a good deal of mileage out of that story in later years, recycling it, with improvements, in a number of lectures, and in the 'Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism', where it is the lady who speaks, and she is guilty of saying "Yes! and it is not only sublime, but beautiful and absolutely *pretty*" (*SWF*, i.362).^[9]

They spent the night of the 21st at Hamilton, and then pressed on to

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Glasgow. Coleridge was impressed by Glasgow Green, spread with washing; and evidently enjoyed the Hogarthian scene: 'a woman-Shaver, & a man with his lathered Chin <most amorously> Ogling her as she had him by the Nose'. Ever on the lookout for conjunctions of opposites, he found an unlikely Glaswegian instance: 'asthmatic Town-Cryer, a ludicrous Combination' (*CN*, i.1454). Dorothy was more struck by the size of the shops (*DWJ*, i.236). It rained. Then on to Dumbarton, where they were shown into the guardroom of the garrison and were introduced to the soldiers' pride and joy: a thirty-six-year-old trout lurking in the gloom of the well (*CN*, i.1461; *DWJ*, i.242). They walked on through the rocky landscape, disagreeing about the size of the boulders: 'one of them larger assuredly than Bowder Stone', recorded Coleridge (*CN*, i.1461), but Dorothy and William did not concur (*DWJ*, i.242). At Luss, their landlady was (in Dorothy's judgment) 'the most cruel and even hateful-looking woman I ever saw' (*DWJ*, i.250). And then to Loch Lomond, the landscape of which Coleridge described with great care, breaking from prose into impromptu sketches, and comparing it with Cumbrian lakes—unfavourably, as it happens: 'wild, & steep, but not particularly interesting & every where we want <miss> the "Statesman's" Houses, & sweet spots of Cumberland Cultivation / but every where there is a distressing Sense of local unrememberableness' (*CN*, i.1468).

The party took an excursion to Loch Katrine, Coleridge declining the boat and walking, on his own, along the shore; his solitariness seems to have improved the landscape for him, and he was even enraptured by it: 'such a visionary Scenel'. He called William his 'Friend' in the notebook, and seems to have been actually quite happy in his company, perhaps for the first time on the trip, though for spiky reasons: 'the pleasantest Evening, I had spent, since my Tour', he

told his wife, ‘for [Wordsworth’s] Hypochondriacal Feelings kept him silent, & [self-]centered’ (CL, ii.978). That is (for Coleridge anyway) a beneficial kind of self-centredness: he admired Wordsworth’s intense selfness a good deal of the time, and thought it intimately allied with the presiding genius of his poetry; but it could have less amiable expressions too. When Coleridge returned to read over these notebook passages in June 1812, after the split with Wordsworth had become irrecoverable, he cancelled his memory of momentary happiness and ease with a sad and terrible interpolation after the word ‘Friend’: ‘O me! what a word to give permanence to the mistake of a Life!’. Coleridge’s physical state must have been worrying, and his company was doubtless trying; Wordsworth suggested Coleridge make his way on his own to Stirling, and catch the coach to Edinburgh; ‘He & Dorothy resolved to fight it out’, Coleridge told Sara, but ‘I eagerly caught at the Proposal’ (CL, ii.978). Samuel Rogers, whom they had met at the inn, and not enjoyed, remembered in his much later *Table Talk* that ‘Coleridge proved so impracticable a travelling-companion, that Wordsworth and his sister were at last

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obliged to separate from him’;^[10] but Coleridge seems to have been more eager than that suggests to work some escape. ‘[P]oor C. being very unwell, determined to send his clothes to Edinburgh and makes the best of his way thither’, Dorothy wrote in her journal (DWJ, i.287). Coleridge’s notebook was more succinct: ‘Here [‘here’ is Arrochar, a little south of Tarbet, where they had been staying] I left W and D ... Tuesday, Aug. 30, 1803—am to make my own way alone to Edingburgh’; and there are two more sad interpolations of 1812 at this point: ‘*utinam nonq[uam] vidissem!*’—‘would that I had never seen them’—and, ‘O Esteeseel! that thou hadst from thy 22nd year indeed made *thy own* way & *alone!*’ (CN, i.1471).

After their separation, Dorothy records, ‘Our thoughts were full of Coleridge, and [...] I shivered at the thought of his being sickly and alone, travelling from place to place’ (DWJ, i.290). The notebook shows Coleridge brooding over Wordsworth in return: ‘My words & actions imaged on his mind, distorted & snaky as the Boatman’s Oar reflected in the Lake –’ (CN, ii.1473); and, a few sheets later, still turning over unkindness and self-punishment: ‘[A.] did a real injury & a very great one to B. in order to make his Hatred more natural, less dæmonish, whereon B. ceases to hate him / soothed by the power of *forgiving* A. & of feeling himself the superior’ (CN, i.1480). He returned to Tarbet for another night, and then struck off; and he found that his spirits leapt: ‘having found myself so happy alone’, he wrote to his wife two days later, ‘such blessing is there in perfect Liberty!—that I walked off—and have walked 45 miles since then’ (CL, ii.979). He was capable of such astonishing transformations: in 1804, after the weather had brought him very low, he managed to walk the nineteen miles from Grasmere to Kendal in four-and-a-half hours ‘& was not in the least fatigued’—‘My state of Health is a Riddle’, as he reported the day after to Poole (CL, ii.1035).

His notebook became his companion, and, though still ill and sleeping badly, he described to it what he was seeing, evoking a terrific sense of presence and presentness: ‘Ben More or the Huge Mountain / One of the highest in the highlands, shaped like a haystack, which dallies with the Clouds, that now touch, now hide, now leave it’ (CN, i.1475). Asked once what he thought the basis of poetry, Larkin replied: ‘I write poems to preserve things I have seen / thought / felt ... I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art’;^[11] and something like the same impulse somehow to retain the intensity of sense experience stirs in these Coleridgean pages too: ‘Among the Beauties of the Highlands in Aug. & Sept. let me not forget the Fumitory with its white flower on the Hovels & Barns / & the Potatoe fields with white Blossoms—appearing to my eye the loveliest & richest flower of Gardens’ (CN, i.1476). Following advice from one Dr Drummond at the Kinghouse Hotel (where he stayed on the 1st of September), Coleridge had determined to

walk through Glen Coe to Fort William, then to Fort St George (or Fort Augustus), and along the length of Loch Ness to Inverness; and finally down through Perthshire to Perth, and on to Edinburgh: an immense walk for someone sick with atonic Gout, but (or so he hoped) a walking cure. The notebook is filled with extraordinary landscape prose; he was evidently in a very agitated state of mind, and extraordinarily alive to the scenes he was witnessing. Of Glencoe, for instance: the historical associations seem to have meant little to him: he would later claim (*TT*, i.413) that the same would be true were he to cross the plain of Marathon (so setting firmly himself against the merely associative power of place described by Dr Johnson in his Scottish tour). Instead, Glencoe appears as a theatre of spectral light effects: ‘the white mists (white with interspaces of diluted Black) floating away from the Mountains, & thinning off along their Breasts—gathering again—again thinning—all in motion—giving phantoms of motion even to the Hills’ (*CN*, i.1485). He thought the hills resembled a saint kneeling: the atmosphere of these pages is at once sharp-eyed and wildly fantastic. Trees seemed scarcely to belong to so visionary a landscape, ‘on the mountain walls, for so they are, brown-green with moss, bright green with stream-hiding Grass, & pinky in streaks where the Rain-rills flowed or are flowing ... I glimpsed Trees here & there / but they looked like Apparitions’ (*CN*, i.1486). (Seeing *things*, which is what this section of the notebook is devoted to most assiduously and vigorously, just begins to modulate into *seeing* things.) Unsurprisingly, by the time he reached Fort William he was completely exhausted, after a strenuous day of some 30 miles, and broke into ‘hysterical weeping’ (as he confessed to the notebook, the end of an enormous entry: *CN*, i.1487). He could scarcely stand up (*CL*, ii.980): it was ‘perhaps too much for one day’, he conceded to his wife in a letter the next day, ‘yet I am positive, I should not have felt it, but for that unfortunate Drench of Water’ (*CL*, ii.981)—he had stopped to drink from a stream, and the water had upset his fragile digestion. He spent a day in Fort William writing up the notebook, and having his torn and tattered clothes washed; and on the 4th, a Sunday, he set off again, full of a ‘hearty breakfast’, aiming first for Glen Nevis, and then for Fort Augustus.

‘The Head of Glen Nevish how simple for a Painter / & in how many words & how laboriously, in what dim similitudes & slow & dragging Circumlocutions must I give it’, he complains, ‘O for words to explain how Slate & Limestone lie!’ – ‘Silly words I am vexed with you’. Yet it is a familiar common Coleridgean paradox, for he is also using words wonderfully well: both to describe the visionary topography of this Caledonian Xanadu—‘it is a savage dreamlike, unlively Place’, ‘before me, on my road to F. Aug. it is indeed more of *one mass*, delved, rifted, channel’d, wrinkled, & with a dipping, leaping, tipsy outline’—and to making minutely new the (supposedly) familiar. Another water-effect:

having mounted a little & seen that there was not probably anything more to be noticed,
I turned back — & now my mind being as it were

leisurely and of[f] the stretch with what delight did I look at a floatage of Shadows on the water, made by the wavelets of the Stream, with what delight that most exquisite net at the bottom / sandy + pebbly river, all whose loops are wires of sunshine, gold finer than silk, beside yon Stone the Breeze seems to have blown them into a Heap, a rich mass of light, light spreading from the loop holes into the interstices / O we turn from novelties & rarities to old Delights & simple Beauty!

(*CN*, i.1489)

It is a wonderfully artful and self-delighting piece of writing, which attributes to nature's appearances a delightful artistry: no wonder, then, that he goes on to object to those people—the Wordsworths, perhaps, as Kathleen Coburn suggests—who 'hold it undignified to illustrate Nature by Art ... how else can we bring the forms of Nature within our voluntary memory?' (CN, i.1489). Again, the theme is one of withholding these experiences within the mind; and it is not implausible, perhaps, to find an edge of neediness to the impulse: 'how else...?'

He stayed at Letter Finlay on the fourth; and went on to Fort Augustus, where, as he later explained to his wife, and to Southey (CL, ii.982, 984), he was taken for a spy, and seized by the Governor and his Constable, who locked him up for the night—a story which, in later life (in 1812), Henry Crabb Robinson heard him tell, suitably embellished:

He related anecdotes of himself. Once he was arrested as a spy at Fort St. George. The Governor, as soon as he saw him, muttered, 'an ill-looking fellow.' At first everything that Coleridge could say for himself was ingeniously perverted and applied against him; but at length a card he accidentally had by him, from a person of quality, convinced the Governor that he was a gentleman, and procured for him an invitation to breakfast next morning. Coleridge then took an opportunity of asking the Governor what it was in his appearance that induced him to say 'an ill-looking fellow.' 'My dear sir,' said the Governor, squeezing him by the hand, 'I nearly lost my sight in the West Indies, and cannot see a yard before me.'^[12]

It is a comic turn, of course, of a kind Coleridge specialised in; but, like many of his comic turns, it has more business than being simply amusing; and in the recollected context of the Scottish tour you can see it enjoys an odd sort of antithetical imaginative logic: mid-way through this epic journey of the eye, what could be a more natural source of comic relief than an encounter with someone who can scarcely see at all. Seeing properly, from yourself to the world without, and not being able to see outside yourself at all: these were the imaginative poles between which Coleridge's Scottish tour made its wavering,

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heady progress.

The Governor of Fort Augustus had the goodness to give him a decent breakfast anyhow; and he was off, via a night at a mysterious place (now disappeared) which he calls the General's Hut, to Inverness. The landscape around Loch Ness seems almost literally haunting: 'Four Trees I never shall forget ... Altogether it is no doubt a glorious Scene' (CN, i.1492); and a little later, neologising enchantingly, 'Birches of all shapes & Twisture, & white Clouds of many Shapes in the blue Sky above / S. Rosa had the conifers & chesnut / I would study the Birch / it should be my only Tree' (CN, i.1495). Again, the comparison with Hopkins suggests itself ('What you look hard at seems to look hard at you'^[13]): 'rocks as before, & Trees, O in what wild Twistures starting out of the rocks, which their roots split as with a wedge ... Let me not, in the intense *vividness of the Remembrance*, forget to note down the bridging Rock ... ' and so on (CN, i.1495). Leaving Inverness, after a night kept awake by the shrieks of dancers downstairs, he took a post chaise south, enduring what his notebook records as a 'mad drunk Post Boy whom I was soon obliged to quit / tho' the mad Blackguard was not so well disposed to quit me' (CN, i.1496). He may, just, have gone to Cullen, or perhaps to Culloden (though, as we know, the historical associations wouldn't have been much of an incentive for him): in a letter to the Beaumonts he says Cullen (CL, ii.994), but that seems unlikely; alternatively, it has been suggested that he may mean 'Killen'. Anyway, as he was travelling he continued to write his views; he observed (CN, i.1497) the fine effects of larches (he was always more indulgent toward them than Wordsworth).^[14] He stayed at Aviemore for a night, and continued south,

contemplating the scene in buoyant spirits, and likening the chaotic mountain scene spread before him to ‘a vast room left by Drunkards—short tables, & high Tables, & side Tables, & cushions in confusion — & the hundred forms that can be brought into no Analogy ... I who adore Nature was kept *grinning* at the Scene’ (CN, i.1496). Two more days of walking, with stopovers at Dalwhinnie and Kenmore, and he finally came to Perth, arriving at half past eight on the Sunday evening. There a letter was waiting for him from Southey, whose little girl Margaret was dead: the Southey family had moved into Greta Hall so that Edith could be with her sister. Coleridge wrote emotionally, ‘I will knit myself far closer to you than I have hitherto done — & my children shall be your’s till it please God to send you another’ (CL, ii.982)—and that, as Richard Holmes drily remarks in his biography, turned out to be truer than Southey could have known.^[15]

By his own calculation, Coleridge had walked 263 miles in eight days (CL, ii.982). But if he was hoping for the cure of his several symptoms he was disappointed: he was troubled once again by appalling dreams—as he wrote to

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Southey, enclosing the most unexpected production of the Scottish tour, ‘The Pains of Sleep’.

... yesternight I pray’d aloud
In Anguish and in Agony,
Awaking from the fiendish Crowd
Of Shapes & Thoughts that tortur’d me!
Desire with Loathing strangely mixt
On wild or hateful Objects fixt:
Pangs of Revenge, the powerless Will,
Still baffled, & consuming still,
Sense of intolerable Wrong,
And men whom I despis’d made strong ...
Deeds to be hid that were not hid,
Which, all confus’d I might not know,
Whether I suffer’d, or I did:
For all was Horror, Guilt & Woe,
My own or others, still the same,
Life-stifling Fear, Soul-stifling Shame!

‘I do not know how I came to scribble down these verses to you’, he told Southey, ‘my heart was aching, my head all confused—but they are, doggerel as they may be, a true portrait of my nights.—What to do, I am at a loss:—for it is hard thus to be withered, having the faculties & attainments, which I have.—’ (CL, ii.984). ‘It has been an instructive tho’ melancholy Tour’, he wrote to his wife from Perth, preparing to catch the 4 a.m. coach to Edinburgh (CL, ii.985); and, reflecting on his last few days (if Coburn’s arrangement of entries is right), he told the notebook: ‘There have been times when looking up beneath the sheltring Trees, I could Invest every leaf with Awe’ (CN, i.1510). He found Edinburgh ‘a wonderful City!’, a bizarrely elongated place, he thought, ‘a city looked at in the polish’d back of a Brobdignag Spoon, held lengthways—so enormously *stretched-up* are the Houses’, ‘a sort of bastard Sublimity’ as he called it (CL, i.988), after (I suppose) his protracted exposure to the genuine article. Four things were worth seeing in Scotland, he wrote to Southey, if you had already been to the Lake District: the view of the islands of Loch Lomond; the Trossachs about Loch Katrine; the Falls of Foyers (by Loch Ness); and Edinburgh—Glen Coe, perhaps, ‘at all events a good Make-weight’ (CL, ii.989). He climbed Arthur’s Seat, and ended his tour as he had begun it: ‘I stood gazing at the setting Sun, so

tranquil to a passing Look, & so restless & vibrating to one who looks stedfast...' (CL, ii.989). He caught the Carlisle coach first thing Wednesday, arriving at midnight; and finally turned up at Greta Hall noon on Thursday.

III

If we were to try and describe his extraordinary experience of Scotland, we

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might begin by considering its two main productions, and their startling diversity: the intensely vivid, hugely idiosyncratic travelogue of the notebook, on the one hand, and 'The Pains of Sleep', on the other. You can make out beneath his witness throughout the tour the intense version of a life-long tussle, one which was (as I began by saying) finding itself, in the summer of 1803, mounting to a form of crisis: a hectic swinging between the horrors of an unchecked inwardness and the solace of reconnection with outward realities. Sleep and dreams, often in Coleridge a positively-intended metaphor for the self-sufficiency of the imagination (as in the 'Preface' to 'Kubla Khan') are transformed in 'The Pains of Sleep' into a terrible, inescapable inwardness: what he calls in the original version of the poem sent to Southey, 'The self-created Hell within'. The once pervasive goodness of God, in Creation at large as in Coleridge in particular—the belief that '*round me, in me, every where / Eternal Strength & Goodness are!*'—is twisted into the ubiquity of shame and fear: 'all was Horror, Guilt & Woe, / My own or others, still the same, / Life-stifling Fear, Soul-stifling Shame!'. Faced with the nightly prospect of nightmare's claustrophobic persecution, the diverse world of external reality is clung to as a check to the self-creations of the unhappy self: external things are, as he puts it in a later notebook entry, the 'outward Forms and Sounds, the Sanctifiers, the Strengtheners!' (CN, ii.2543). The subtext to the Scottish tour, then, is strangely close to something mysterious that Wordsworth expresses in 'Tintern Abbey': the intense love of nature that is inspired in 'a man / Flying from something that he dreads, [rather] than one / Who sought the thing he loved'—for Wordsworth, perhaps, the horrors of his implication in the violence of France; for Coleridge, the horrors of his own mind. And you can see here, too, how the contemporary thickening film on Wordsworth's eyes might fit into the patterns of thinking that are establishing themselves: the (alleged) distortions of Wordsworth's egotism—the oar refracted through the dense medium of the lake's water—are a kind of incipient blindness, here of an ethical kind: a lack of connection or transparent openness to the world outside him—a world which, in this case, happens to consist of S.T. Coleridge.

IV

But what of Scottishness? Well, as it happens, Coleridge's thoughts were on the kind of Scottishness I began by describing on the very eve of his departure into the North: 'The pain I suffer & have suffered, in differing so from such men, such true men of England, as [. . .], & their affectionate love of Locke / Left no room in my heart for any pain from Scotch Reviewers—' (CN, i.1418). It is not entirely obvious which true Englishmen Coleridge is talking about, but the gist seems to be clear enough: I have been dismayed by good Englishmen, who have abandoned 'the spiritual platonic old England' (CN, ii.2598) for the sandy sophisms of Locke, so the born Lockceans of *Scotland* aren't able to hurt me with their barbed remarks (he must be referring to

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Jeffrey's review of the Lake School). There is a life-long connection between Scotland and the kinds of philosophy of which Coleridge vehemently disapproved—Lockeans not Berkeleyans, Aristotelians not Platonists; and it can, ironically enough, inspire Coleridge to sound positively Johnsonian at times. Alexander Dyce recalled that Coleridge had 'a mortal antipathy to Scotchmen, produced perhaps, or at any rate strengthened, by the remarks of the Edinburgh reviewers on the Lake Poets'.^[16] He deplored, for instance, the way that 'low cunning, habitual cupidity, presumptuous sciolism [superficial pretence of knowledge], and heart-hardening vanity, *caledonianize* the human face' (*SWF*, i.336). Wordsworth's faults, as Coleridge angrily analysed them in a later notebook, could look very Caledonian in that sense, stemming as they did from his 'his Northernness; + his Attorney sonship + his Self-idolatory' (*CN*, iii.4243, n.), as though he were a kind of honorary Scotsman. Incidentally, that Scots prefer to use the word *Scots* was itself very telling, thought Coleridge, since it means they are hiding the 'tch' sound in 'Scotchman': 'just cast you eye on the finals, tch, in Walker's rhyming Dictionary', he remarked in the course of a protracted piece of anti-Caledonian mischief in his notebook—'Bitch, Botch, Snitch, Blotch, Ditch, Grutch, crutch, clutch, Witch, Scritch ... a catalogue of Characteristics, equally consonant with the *Thing*, as with the *Word*, "Scotch", in short, a monosyllabic yet compleat Compendium of *its* qualities, habits, customs, doings, sufferings, and circumstances' (*CN*, iii.4134).

A lot of this bad feeling settled around the figure of Sir James Mackintosh, prominent lawyer, prominent Lockean, and Coleridge's only rival for the best talker in London. 'The great dung-fly Mackintosh', he called him in a letter to Southey (*CL*, i.588); and later, in his Highgate Table-Talk, he suggested that one might 'write on his forehead, "Warehouse to let"' (*TT*, i.42). 'Burke was a metaphysician', Coleridge told the young Hazlitt, but 'Mackintosh a mere logician. Burke was an orator (almost a poet) who reasoned in figures, because he had an eye for nature: Mackintosh, on the other hand, was a rhetorician, who had only an eye to common-places'.^[17] Coleridge's spiteful little poem, 'The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone' has Mackintosh as its target:

From Aberdeen hither this Fellow did skip
 With a waxy Face and a blabber Lip,
 And a black Tooth in front, to show in part
 What was the Colour of his whole Heart!
 This Counsellor sweet! This Scotchman compleat!
 Apollyon *scotch* him for a Snake—
 I trust he lies in his Grave awake!^[18]

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'[A] *humane* Wish' Coleridge emphasised facetiously to Davy (*CL*, i.633). It is almost certainly Mackintosh who provoked one of Coleridge's more celebrated anti-Scotticisms: 'Sir, he is a Scotchman, and a rascal, and I do not lay the emphasis on *rascal*'.^[19] The Scotchmen, he told the table, are either dull Frenchmen, or superficial Germans (*TT*, 315).

The fun is scarcely PC, nor even much fun I suppose; but it does have a Coleridgean point of a kind to it; which is that the kind of empiricism represented by the Scottish philosophical school, and pre-eminently Hume, leads (in Coleridge's view), and paradoxical as it may seem, to abstraction and egotism. Paradoxical, because empiricism seems most common-sensically to insist on the precedence of our experience of the world; but, in practice, it insists only upon the reality of our experiencing *minds*;^[20] and so, ultimately, as Coleridge protests in *Biographia*, it 'banishes us to a land of shadows, surrounds us with apparitions ... removes all reality and immediateness of perception, and places us in a dream-world of phantoms and spectres, the inexplicable swarm and equivocal generation of motions in our own brains' (*BL*, i.262, 137). There is the metaphor of the bewildering and disorientating dream again: it is not at all dissimilar from the

terrible kind of self-imprisoned dream he described in the nightmare poem sent to Southey. In both cases—though in the case of the caricature Scotsman, with egotistical self-complacency—the predicament is one of ego-bound disconnection. As often, you find a brilliant and comic Coleridge commentary in Lamb: the portrait of the Caledonian in Lamb’s essay ‘Imperfect Sympathies’—‘He does not find, but bring. You never witness his first apprehension of a thing’ — is a fine turn on the Coleridgean type; and the point at issue is a kind of damaging blindness to the external world, to all that is not the self.



But if Scottishness represented for Coleridge a kind of egotism, philosophical and ethical, then Scotland had proved itself a redeeming source of diverse, savingly external, natural delight—‘O we turn from novelties & rarities to old Delights & simple Beauty! —’. And at least one Scot had recognised that, as Coleridge knew:

Who has not a thousand times seen snow fall on water? Who has not watched it with a new feeling, from the time that he has read Burns’ comparison of sensual pleasure

“To snow that falls upon a river

A moment white — then gone forever!” (*BL*, i.81)

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It was a favourite example: Coleridge claimed that he would have rather written those two lines ‘than all the poetry that his countryman Scott ... is likely to produce’.^[21] And what matters about it is not the aptness of Burns’s metaphor, but the sharpness of the recollected image which it utilises: evidence of Burns’s gift for the external. As he writes in *Biographia*, quoting himself from *The Friend*:

To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with appearances, which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar;

With sun and moon and stars throughout the year,
And man and woman;

this is the character and privilege of genius, and one of the marks which distinguish genius from talents. And therefore is it the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence. (*BL*, i.80-1)

The recuperation effected by ‘freshness of sensation’ occurs several times, in biography, in literary criticism, and in theory, during *Biographia*: it is one of the recurrent motifs of that poetically structured work: the book practically begins with Coleridge saved from the self-involution of metaphysics by reading the sonnets of Bowles, which reawaken his ‘love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds’ (*BL*, i.17). Just such restoration is what Scotland kindly offered Coleridge during the difficult months of 1803; and he ended the tour, possibly while he was still in Edinburgh, contemplating a new project:

Seem to have made up my mind to write my metaphysical works, as *my Life*, & in my Life—intermixed with all the other events / or history of the mind & fortunes of S.T. Coleridge (CN, i.1515).

So, besides being an attack on philosophical Scottishness, we could perhaps claim *Biographia*, with its formative rhythm of resort from the troubled self to the redemptive world, as the greatest, if long delayed, fruit of Coleridge's Scottish excursion, its protracted and intense episode of 'feeding abroad'.^[22]

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- [1] Quoted by John Glendening, *The High Road: Romantic Tourism, Scotland, and Literature 1720-1820* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 122.
- [2] Quoted by Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), i.10-11.
- [3] Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 122-3. I am much indebted to Mark Reed's reconstruction of the party's early travels in Scotland.
- [4] Reed, *Middle Years*, 221-2, n..
- [5] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), 469.
- [6] For the principles of the treatment of gout, I am indebted to a paper given by Neil Vickers at the 2000 Coleridge Conference at Cannington.
- [7] See my *Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections* (Basingstoke/NY: Palgrave, 2000), 99, n.23.
- [8] *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 152.
- [9] See *Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections*, 99, n.24.
- [10] *Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections*, 96.
- [11] Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (London: Faber, 1983), 79.
- [12] *Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections*, 134.
- [13] Hopkins, *Journals*, 204.
- [14] '(The Larch, which pushes out in tassels green / It's bundled Leafits)': 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson', ll.26-7. Coleridge had looked appreciatively at larches earlier in the tour (CN, i.1460).
- [15] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 354.
- [16] *Reminiscences of Alexander Dyce*, ed. Richard J. Schrader ([n.p.]: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 178.
- [17] *Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections*, 58.
- [18] ll.13-20; in *Poems*, ed. John Beer (London: Everyman, 1999), 361.
- [19] *Reminiscences of Alexander Dyce*, 178.
- [20] See A.D. Nuttall, *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (London: Chatto and Windus for Sussex University Press, 1974).
- [21] *Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections*, 143.
- [22] CN, iii 3420