Chapter Four

THE MARINER'S EXTRAVAGANCE AND THE TEMPESTS OF LYRICAL BALLADS

Dominant twentieth-century opinion of "The Ancient Mariner" separates esthetics and its allies, psychology and philosophy, from politics and credits Coleridge's emergence as a great poet to his liberation from polemical poetry and newspaper writing. Humphrey House's *Clark Lectures* (1953) represents common opinion: "It has been observed by Dr. Tillyard how very unpolitical 'The Ancient Mariner' is. 'Frost at Midnight' (dated February 1798—that is while the 'Mariner' was still being written) is, if possible, less political still." Carl Woodring's *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge* (1961) echoes House, expressing severe reservations about David Erdman's claims for the political significance of "The Ancient Mariner": "When Dr. Erdman reasons that Coleridge was 'objectifying the dereliction and dis­may of the times in an imaginatively controlled nightmare *The Ancient Mariner*,' he goes beyond what we can demonstrate to the skeptical."¹ With a few notable exceptions, particularly William Empson and Jerome McGann,² critics have read "The Ancient Mariner" as either a story of crime and punishment, a narrative of spiritual death and rebirth, as in Robert Penn Warren's essay, or as a psychological tale of personal disintegration, as in Edward Bostetter's *Romantic Ventriloquists*.³ In both the symbolic and the psychological readings, "The Ancient Mariner" is removed from its historical contexts of 1798 and 1817 and read as a separate and integral poem, explicated with writings of Colerdige that appeared a full twenty years after


its original publication. The discourses of aesthetics and politics are completely separate.

"The Ancient Mariner" is a poem with political significance, but that significance cannot be recognized unless the poem is located within the public debates raging over the events and principles of the French Revolution and within the context of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's protest poetry. Its location in Lyrical Ballads (1798), the insistently literary paratext that the other poems provide, and the allusions within the poem align it with the public discourse in the 1790s. A reading that limits evidence to the poem itself or attempts to connect its figures literally with public events or political theory is undermined by the appearance of the poem itself in 1798. With the archaic spellings and the absence of the later gloss, the poem is, visually, a fake, a counterfeit similar to the poems of Chatterton and Macpherson. Any attempt to identify its ideology, periods of history represented, or cultural significance must account for the poem's appearance. As Charles Burney realized in his review, the poem is not an innocent imitation of an earlier style but a counterfeit history. He deplored the tendency "to go back to the barbarous and uncouth numbers of Chaucer" and remarked that "Rust is necessary quality to a counterfeit old medal; but, to give artificial rust to modern poetry, in order to render it similar to that of three or four hundred years ago, can have no better title to merit and admiration than may be claimed by any ingenious forgery." If it is a counterfeit, it can have no history, nor can it represent history because a counterfeit or forgery has no time, no tense, except the present. An acknowledged forgery has its own moment distinct from that which it imitates. That moment cannot represent an earlier historical period because a counterfeit or forgery announces its inauthenticity. If "The Ancient Mariner" of 1798 is read as an imitation of a native English tradition, it is located in the public discourse, not as representative of an earlier historical period, but as a part of a debate over the value of literary history and tradition deeply involved in the public discourse in 1798.

"The Ancient Mariner" reveals its contemporary significance from its location in 1798: the circumstances of its composition, the varying emphases of its reception, and the allusiveness of its style. I read the discourse that it enters in 1798 in Lyrical Ballads. My intention is not to substitute a political reading for an aesthetic one, but to read politically to argue that an aesthetic reading is limited by its own boundaries and, by excluding a consciousness of social issues, cannot read literature's public mediation. To displace the one with the other would be to substitute one enabling blindness for another. The complex situation of literature in the 1790s is that the discourse of aesthetics is often figurative of the discourse of politics, and that the tropes of the literary are often the public rhetoric of law courts and pub-

4 Charles Burney, Review of Lyrical Ballads, Monthly Review (June 1799: 203) in RR.
lic addresses. Nor is my purpose to insist, here and elsewhere in these chap-
ters, on a materialism that reduces itself to a literalism and thus can detect
a willful ignorance and a consciousness eager to evade the responsibilities
of social engagement. I prefer to read displacement as figuration, since fig-
uration implies a troubled presentness to awareness that displacement tends
to discount and find culpable.

Lyrics take their significance from their location. In the case of “The An-
cient Mariner,” I read Coleridge’s decisions about publication. My claim is
not that “The Ancient Mariner” is in itself a poem of explicit political com-
mentary—Woodring’s skepticism is appropriate for such claims—but that
if one reads the poem carefully as one fragment of the public discourse, its
significance changes. It is not a poem that avoids or evades political issues
for the secure comforts of retirement or a dreamworld to which Coleridge
escapes; it is a poem that enters the public debates. In reading the public
poem, one must read the nuances of words reviewers used to describe it and
the literary history that was constructed to authorize it. I then use the
rhetoric of the poem’s reception and the history that is forged to support it
as a way of reading the public figures of “The Ancient Mariner” in Lyrical
Ballads. The language that reviewers use to describe the poem is crucial;
“The Ancient Mariner” is “German,” “extravagant,” “obscure,” “unintelli-
gible,” “absurd,” a “rhapsody” and a “farrago,” a set of terms opposed to the
more conventional ones of “elegant,” “proper,” “classical,” and “tasteful.”
The vocabulary of its reception derives from the discourse that precedes
and is contemporary with the writing of the poem. Insofar as it is extrava-
gant, it is an appropriate introductory poem for Lyrical Ballads, whose major
theme is that of wandering, placelessness, and homelessness and whose
major tropes are those of vagrancy and tempest.

I begin a survey of the context of “The Ancient Mariner” with Hazlitt’s
“On the Living Poets” from his Lectures on the English Poets (1818), which
characterizes the Lake School of poets: “This school of poetry had its ori-
gin in the French revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions
which produced that revolution; and which sentiments and opinions were
indirectly imported into this country in translations from the German
about that period.” Later in the same lecture, Hazlitt said that Coleridge’s
“Ancient Mariner is his most remarkable performance, and the only one
that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great nat-
ural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to ‘conceive of
poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, pre-
sent, and to come,’ ”5 unmindful, in other words, of time and history. The
political keyword in these comments is German, one that is repeated again
and again in contemporary reviews of “The Ancient Mariner.” Hazlitt, who
began writing for the Edinburgh Review in 1815, may have been drawing on

5 Howe 5: 161, 166. Howe identifies the quotation from Measure for Measure IV, ii, 148–52.
Francis Jeffrey's famous review of Southey's *Thalaba* in the *Edinburgh* (Oct. 1802), where he characterized the poetry of Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth:

The peculiar doctrines of this sect, it would not, perhaps, be very easy to explain; but, that they are *dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism, is admitted, and proved indeed, by the whole tenor of their compositions. Though they lay claim, we believe, to a creed and a revelation of their own, there can be little doubt, that their doctrines are of *German* origin, and have been derived from some of the great modern reformers in that country.

It may seem odd that Hazlitt's and Jeffrey's emphasis falls upon Germany and not France as the origin of the politics of the Lake School, but Jeffrey is quite specific by enumerating "the sources from which their materials have been derived"; one that he cites is the "simplicity and energy . . . of Kotzebue and Schiller." Jeffrey adds "A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society, seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments."

In his *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth* (1820), Hazlitt explains his association of "the Goethes, the Lessings, the Schillers, the Kotzebues" as "the only incorrigible Jacobins, and their school of poetry is the only real school of Radical Reform." The German drama goes

all the lengths not only of instinctive feeling, but of speculative opinion, and startling the hearer by overturning all the established maxims of society, and setting at nought all the received rules of composition. It cannot be said of this style that in it "decorum is the principle thing." It is the violation of decorum, that is its first and last principle, the beginning, middle and end. It is an insult and defiance to Aristotle's definition of tragedy. The action is not grave, but extravagant . . . We are no longer as formerly heroes in warlike enterprise; martyrs to religious faith; but we are all the partisans of a political system, and devotees to some theory of moral sentiments.

Having noted that in the German drama seamstresses express noble sentiments and aspire to wed nobles, that noble women commit adultery with similarly ideal sentiments, and that young nobles turn robbers, Hazlitt summarizes the discourse of the German drama:

All qualities are reversed: virtue is always at odds with vice, "which shall be which:" the internal character and external situation, the actions and the sentiments, are never in accord: you are to judge everything by contraries . . . The world and every thing in it is not just what it ought to be, or what it pretends to be; or such extravagant and prodigious paradoxes would be driven from the stage. . . . Opinion is not truth: appearance is not reality: power is not beneficence: rank is not wisdom: nobility is not the only virtue: riches are not happiness: desert and success are different things: actions do not always speak of
the character more than words. We feel this, and do justice to the romantic extravaganza of the German Muse.\(^6\)

Hazlitt was not alone in his evaluation. Before “The Ancient Mariner” was published, T. J. Mathias wrote in “The Shade of Alexander Pope”:

Lo, from the abyss, unmeaning Spectres drawn,
The Gothick glass, blue flame, and flick'ring lawn!  
Choak'd with vile weeds, our once proud Avon strays,  
When novels die, and rise again in plays:  
No Congress props our Drama's falling state,  
The modern ultimatum is, 'Translate,'  
Thence sprout the morals of the German School:  
The Christian sinks, the Jacobin bears rule.

A note to these lines explains that “the modern productions of the German stage, which silly men and women are daily translating, have one general tendency to Jacobinism. . . . They are too often the licensed vehicles of immorality and licentiousness, particularly in respect to marriage.”\(^7\)

Jeffrey's extended comparison of the Lake poets to a sect of dissenters connects them with the German Illuminati. Crabb Robinson explains the organization:

During the heat of the first Revolution in France, two works appeared, one in England, by Professor Robison of Edinburgh, and the other, the more voluminous, in France, by the Abbé Barruel, with the common object of showing that the Revolution and all the horrors consequent on it were the effect of a conspiracy deliberately planned and carried out on the Continent of Europe by an Order of Infidels, who, by means of secret societies, planned to destroy all thrones, overturn all altars, and completely upset the established order of things. The society to which this scheme was ascribed had the name of The Illuminati. . . . The Kantian philosophy was one of their instruments. Indeed more or less, every union of men, and every variety of thought, opposed to monarchy and popery had about it the suspicion of “Illumination.” And of this tremendous evil the founder and archdeacon was Adam Weishaupt.\(^8\)

\(^6\) Howe 6: 360–62. Hazlitt's quotations echo Milton, “On Education” and Macbeth III, iv, 127, where Lady Macbeth says that night is “almost at odds with morning, which is which.”


Writing of secret Irish revolutionary societies, Coleridge, in the Courier of Sept. 29, 1814, explained that

the Bavarian Weishaupt attempted to combine the secret oaths and filiated societies of Free Masonry, with the discipline, education, and mechanized obedience of the disciples of Loyola; and succeeded so far as to furnish some few hints and materials for that monstrous romance of the Illumino [sic] with which the fanatics, Barruel and Robison, astonished and terrified the good people of England, Ireland, and Vienna. (EOT 2: 382)

Discussion of the Illuminati was common in the press in the 1790s. On January 17, 1798 the Morning Post described the Illuminati as "enlightened" men who "wished to impress mankind with a sense of their dignity, and thus to produce a revolution, the result of reason," while the Anti-Jacobin Review in August 1798 stigmatized them as "vile instruments of the most desperate race of miscreants that ever disgraced humanity" (217).

Jeffrey's allusion to the "great modern reformers" in Germany is tinged with a bit of sarcasm. Whether or not Jeffrey intended to allude to the Illuminati in his identification of the Lake School's German origin, his accusations are quite precise. The source of their opinions may be found, to a large extent, in the German drama of Kotzebue and Schiller. In this association Jeffrey may be following the contemporary reviews of Lyrical Ballads, several of which used the word German to describe "The Ancient Mariner." Southey's comment is perhaps the most famous. In the Critical Review for October 1798, he called it "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity," which may have been the occasion for Hazlitt's more sympathetic rejoinder that it is "high German." Earlier in his review, Southey had complained of "The Idiot Boy" as a "Flemish picture in the worthlessness of its design and the excellence of its execution. From Flemish artists we are satisfied with such pieces; who would not have lamented, if Corregio or Rafaelle had wasted their talents in painting Dutch boors or the humors of a Flemish wake?" To Southey the subject matter was unworthy, but he was well aware of what "German sublimity" implied to his readers, particularly that of German drama. In a letter written a few months after the review was published, he commented that "the German plays have always something ridiculous, yet Kotzebue seems to me possessed of unsurpassed and unsurpassable genius. I wonder his plays are acted here; they are so thoroughly Jacobinical in tendency. They create Jacobinical feelings, almost irresistibly. In every one that I have yet seen... some old prejudice or old principle is attacked."\footnote{Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey, ed. John Wood Warter (London, 1856) 1: 68.}

In some cases the reviewers' comments on the poem's German style were prompted by a sentence in the Advertisement to Lyrical Ballads, which said that "the Rime of the Ancyent Marinere was professedly written in imita-
tion of the style, as well as of the spirit of the elder poets." Earlier in the Advertisement Wordsworth had warned that readers will find less to complain of "the more conversant the reader is with our elder writers." Wordsworth found his traditions in early poetry, but Southey denied that "The Ancient Mariner" was written in the style of an English ballad: "We are tolerably conversant with the early English poets; and can discover no resemblance whatever, except in antiquated spelling and a few obsolete words." To Southey the style was not English, but German. An anonymous reviewer in the Analytical Review for December 1798 echoed Southey's criticism: "We are not pleased with it: in our opinion it has more of the extravagance of a mad German poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writers." This harsh judgment comes as something of a surprise because the Analytical was published by Joseph Johnson, the radical bookseller, who in the same months was publishing Coleridge's Fears in Solitude. To the Analytical, "The Ancient Mariner" was not only German, which meant Jacobin, but its German extravagance was contrasted with English simplicity.

The word extravagant occurs repeatedly in describing the poem in particular and German literature in general. Reviewing Sibylline Leaves in November of 1817, the British Critic remarked on Coleridge's "wildness of imagination" that is "apt to degenerate into extravagance." In 1828 Thomas Colley Grattan recorded a conversation with Coleridge, who related an anecdote at Mrs. Barbauld's "a few days after" Lyrical Ballads was published in which "Pinkerton the geographer" ridiculed "The Ancient Mariner." Since the volume was published anonymously, Coleridge could join in the ridicule without revealing himself as the author. After Pinkerton described the poem as "an extravagant farrago of absurdity," "detestable," and "odious," Coleridge responded that it was "intolerable," "abominable," and "loathsome." Coleridge's anecdote may or may not be accurate, but his repeating the word "extravagance" echoes its use in reviews and, with Coleridge's acknowledgment, types the poem as extravagant. In its root meaning, extravagance suggests excessive wandering and vagrancy, unbounded voyaging beyond the proper bounds of political, religious, and moral order. To be extravagant is to violate boundaries, to transgress, and to search for (or be forced into) the political sublime, a world of disorder and fragmentation. Its appeal for Coleridge is obvious. The German po-

10 All quotations from Lyrical Ballads are from Jonathan Wordsworth's reprint of the first volume of 1798 (Oxford: Woodstock, 1990). References are to pages.

11 TT 2: 495. Since Coleridge was in Germany a few days after the publication of Lyrical Ballads, the story is at least partly fabricated.

12 Kurt Heinzelman quotes the final chapter of Thoreau's Walden: "I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extra-vagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limit of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced" (The Economics of the Imagination [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980] 30).
political sublime partook of none of the French militant atheism and materialism.

A similar unfavorable judgment was contained in a brief notice in the *Monthly Magazine*, to the effect that “the author of *Lyrical Ballads* has attempted to imitate the style of our old English versifiers, with unusual success: *The Anciente Marinere,* however, on which he particularly prides himself, is in our opinion, a particular exception.” The harsh judgment is surprising considering Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s original intention to submit the poem to the *Monthly* to pay the expenses of a walking tour, and considering the *Monthly’s* political principles, which began in 1796 when its first number announced its purpose to give “aid to the propagation of those liberal principles respecting some of the most important concerns of mankind, which have been either deserted or virulently opposed by other Periodical Miscellanies.” It also had a particular interest in German literature. Its second number contained William Taylor’s translation of Bürger’s “Lenore.” Considering the popularity of Burger’s poem, which also appeared in at least four other translations within the year, including one by Walter Scott, Coleridge’s expectation that the *Monthly* would admire “The Ancient Mariner” was reasonable. The *Monthly’s* opinion can be briefly summarized: “Not British.”

Perhaps the most common comment in the reviews was that the poem was obscure. Southey wrote that “many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible.” The reviewer for the *British Critic* (Oct. 1799) complained of a “kind of confusion of images, which loses all effect, from not being quite intelligible.” In the *Monthly Review* (June 1799) Charles Burney described it as “the strangest story of cock and bull that we ever saw on paper,” in which there was a “rhapsody of unintelligible wildness and incoherence,”—in other words a poem of no determined form. As Burney, a musicologist, surely knew, the rhapsody as a literary and musical form is a miscellaneous collection of fragments without order or bounds, something stitched together. Anne Ferry quotes the definition of *rhapsody* from Elisha Coles’s *An English Dictionary* (1717): “a confused Collection.”

These reviews are probably the origin of Wordsworth’s note to the poem in the second edition which identified its defects: “the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated” and “the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other.” There is, in other words, no narrative.

To many readers the poem was disordered and therefore unintelligible, but it was a significant unintelligibility, because obscurity had significance. When Sheridan rejected Coleridge’s play “Osorio” in the months that Co-

Coleridge was beginning "The Ancient Mariner," Coleridge transmitted Sheridan's objections to Thomas Poole: "his sole objection is—the obscurity of the three last acts" (CL 1: 358). "Osorio" ended with the rebellious Moors in possession of the Spanish citadel, and with a speech by Alhadra, their leader, who boasted that if she had one hundred men she could "shake the kingdoms of this world" (CP 2: 596). Not an ounce of obscurity in that speech. Sheridan's use of the word obscure (if that was his word and not Coleridge's) suggests, not that Coleridge's play was absurd or nonsensical, but that it was disordered and politically dangerous, which it certainly was. That which is a rhapsody, or obscure, or unintelligible, or extravagant in the 1790s is highly suspicious and dangerous to the civil peace. The fragmented rhapsody was not narration but the oratorical figure of legendary narratio as Cicero defined it: "The legendary tale comprises events neither true nor probable." 15 Read as a part of the public discourse, "The Ancient Mariner" is not narration, but legendary narratio, a rhetorical figure located in a work addressed to the public.

In an age when one expects most reviews to be determined by political allegiances, it is curious to find liberal journals finding fault with "The Ancient Mariner." Their grounds for not admiring it appear to be esthetic. The reviews mark a day in which it was becoming increasingly possible to weigh judgments of esthetics as evenly as questions of politics. It is even more odd to find The Reverend William Heath in the Anti-Jacobin Review (April 1800) praising Lyrical Ballads in a language that indicates an opposite esthetic and political evaluation. The volume "has genius, taste, elegance, wit, and imagery of the most beautiful kind. 'The ancint Marinere' is an admirable 'imitation of the style as well as of the spirit of the elder poets.' . . . indeed the whole volume convinces us that the author possesses a mind at once classic and accomplished and we, with pleasure, recommend it to the notice of our readers as a production of no ordinary merit." The Anti-Jacobin Review read the imitation of the elder writers as "classic," as an English, not German, volume, and as an elegant, not extravagant, collection. The word elegant points, not only to the esthetic qualities of refinement and beauty, but also the political categories of that which is proper, since the word means propriety as well as beauty and grace. Thus, in the public discourse, to describe a poem as "German," "extravagant," or "absurd" or to call it a "farrago" or "rhapsody" is to imply that it is politically dangerous and the opposite of "elegant," "classical," "proper," and "tasteful."

The surprise in finding the Anti-Jacobin Review praise the poem as English and elegant rather than extravagant is greater when one realizes that the predecessor of the Anti-Jacobin Review, the Anti-Jacobin; or Weekly Ex-

aminer, had included in its numbers for June 4, and June 11, 1798, a parody of a German play, which it called The Rovers, to ridicule the fashion for German drama that coincided with Coleridge's enthusiasm for Schiller and the writing of "The Ancient Mariner." It is in part a parody of Schiller's Robbers, and the prologue announces its subjects:

To-night our Bard, who scorns pedantic rules,
    His Plot has borrow'd from the German schools;
—The German schools—where no dull maxims bind
The bold expansion of the electric mind.
Fix'd to no period, circled by no space,
He leaps the flaming bounds of time and place:
Round the dark confines of the forest raves,
    With gentle Robbers stocks his gloomy caves;
Tells how Prime Ministers are shocking things,
    And reigning Dukes as bad as tyrant Kings;
How to two swains one nymph her vows may give,
    And how two Damsels with one Lover live!
Delicious Scenes!—Such scenes our Bard displays
Which, crown'd with German, sue for British, praise.

(PAJ 168)

A footnote to the Prologue's reference to The Robbers explains that it is a "German Tragedy, in which Robbery is put in so fascinating a light, that the whole of a German University went upon the highway in consequence of it." Overleaping boundaries is, of course, a Satanic occupation. The Anti-Jacobin's line "He leaps the flaming bounds of time and place" is borrowed from Gray's "The Progress of Poetry": "He passed the flaming bounds of place and time,"16 which refers to Paradise Lost and Satan's entry into Eden: "Due entrance he disdain'd, and in contempt, / At one slight bound high overlap'd all bound / Of Hill or highest Wall . . . " (PL IV, 180–82). "Milton" in the public discourse is frequently a republican and regicide, to Tory and radical alike.

Schiller's Robbers was first translated by A. F. Tytler and published in 1792. Tytler's translation, or perhaps it would be better to call it an adaptation, tones down many of the attacks on the ruling classes and particularly the Church, yet still includes many revolutionary speeches. Charles Moor, the older son of a Count, is disowned and disinherited through the evil plots of younger brother Francis. When he becomes an outlaw, his purposes are not only to live by plunder but to revenge himself upon the corrupt society that cast him out. He becomes literally an incendiary. Even before he is finally

cast off by his father, Charles exclaims: "What a damn'd inequality is the lot of mankind!—While the gold lies useless in the mouldy coffers of the miser, the leaden hand of poverty checks the daring flight of youth, and chills the fire of enterprise." When he receives a letter from his younger brother telling him that he has been disowned, he cries: "Oh! that I could blow the trumpet of rebellion through all nature, and summon heaven, earth and seas against this savage race" (46). When he is surrounded in the forest by government authorities, he is accused of many crimes. His response boldly acknowledges his crimes:

It is true I have assassinated a Count of the empire.—It is true I have burnt and plundered the church of the Dominicans.—It is true I have set fire to your bigotted town, and blown up your powder magazine.—But I have done more than all that.—Look here (holding out his right band) look at these four rings of value.—This ruby I drew from the finger of a minister whom I cut down at the chase, at his prince's feet. He had built his fortune on the miseries of his fellow creatures, and his elevation was mark'd by the tears of the fatherless and the widow.—This diamond I took from a treasurer-general, who made a traffic of offices of trust, and sold honors, the rewards of merit, to the highest bidder.—This Cornelian I wear in honour of a priest whom I strangled with my own hand, for his most pious and passionate lamentation over the fall of the Inquisition.—I could expiate at large, Sir, on the history of these rings if I did not repent already that I have wasted words on a man unworthy to hear me. (96–97)

Finally, when a new recruit arrives to join the band, he says:

I seek for men who can look death in the face—who can play with danger as with a tamed snake—who prize liberty above life and fame—whose names speak comfort to the oppress'd, who can appall the bold and make the tyrant shudder! (115)

Tytler's adaptation was denied a license for the stage. In Coleridge's public lecture "The Plot Discovered," which protested against the Two Bills, Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act and the Seditious Meetings Act, he complained that the enactment of the bills would silence John Thelwall's lecturing: "The public amusements at the Theatre are already under ministerial controul. And if the tremendous sublimity of Schiller, if 'the Robbers' can be legally suppressed by that thing yclept a Lord Chamberlain, in point of literary exhibition it would be unreasonable for Mr. Thelwall to complain" (Lect. 296–97). The first production of The Robbers in England was given as a private performance at Brandenburgh House a few months before the Anti-Jacobin's parody appeared. The performance was noticed in the Morning Chronicle somewhat sourly on May 31: "The Democratic

points of this heavy play were mostly cut out, but the tendency remains.” A

text of the performance was published, as its Preface explains, “in order that

any persons who may have read the exact Translations of it from the Ger-

man, may be enabled to judge of the ungenerous and false aspersions of

Newspaper Writers . . . that it was played there with all the Jacobinical

Speeches that abound in the original.” Hannah More got wind of this per-

formance and expressed disapproval in her Strictures on the Modern System

of Female Education (1799). She was shocked that “persons of quality” ap-

peared in such “distorted and unprincipled compositions which unite the
taste of the Goths with the morals of Bagshot.”

18

1798 and 1799 marked the high point of the vogue for German drama, preci-

sely at the moment when the Anti-Jacobin struck. In the 1798–99 the-

ater season in London, there were no fewer than eight Kotzebue plays in

translation on the stage, including Sheridan’s adaptation of Pizarro. 19 Al-

though Pizarro was a great success, critics looked with increasing fear upon

plays that seemed to encourage the worst excesses of Jacobinism: adultery,

ridicule of the church, and a heavy dose of political freethinking. There was

a rapid decline in the popularity of such plays for both their melodramatic

quality and their political implications at the time of the fear of French in-

vasion. When in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth referred to

“sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant

stories in verse,” his reference is clearly to this vogue and the sensualism

and extravagance that the nation finally came to see in it. 20

Such criticism as The Rovers in the Anti-Jacobin was partly responsible for

the decline in taste for German drama. The Rovers was prefaced by a letter

from a Mr. Higgins, the supposed author, who is, in part, Coleridge, who

had published in the Monthly Magazine some sonnets under the pseudonym

of Nehemiah Higginbottom and an early sonnet in praise of Schiller. As is

clear from his letter, Mr. Higgins had friends in Germany who were mem-

bers of the Illuminati:

I have turned my thoughts more particularly to the German Stage; and have

composed, in imitation of the most popular pieces of that country, which have

already met with so general reception and admiration in this,—a Play: which,

18 For the reception of Schiller in England, see L. A. Willoughby, “English Translations

and Adaptations of Schiller’s ‘Robbers,’” Modern Language Review, 16 (1921): 304 and Mar-


Information on its first performance and reviews is contained in Sybil Rosenfeld, Temples of

Theatres: Some Private Theatres and Theatricals in England and Wales (London: Society of Thea-


20 The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser

if it has a proper run, will, I think, do much to unhinge the present notions of men with regard to the obligations of Civil Society; and to substitute in lieu of a sober contentment, and regular discharge of the duties incident to each man's particular situation, a wild desire of undefinable latitude and extravagance,—an aspiration after shapeless somethings, that can neither be described nor understood,—a contemptuous disgust at all that is, and a persuasion that nothing is as it ought to be—to operate, in short, a general discharge of every man (in his own estimation) from every tie which laws divine or human, which local customs, immemorial habits, and multiplied examples impose upon him; and to set them about doing what they like, where they like, and how they like,—without reference to any law but their own will, or to any consideration of how others may be affected by their conduct. (PAJ 162–63)

The optimistic Mr. Higgins then outlines the assumptions on which his play is written:

Destroy the frame of society,—decompose its parts,—and set the elements fighting one against another,—insulated and individual,—every man for himself (stripped of prejudice, of bigotry and of feeling for others) against the remainder of his species;—and there is then some hope of a totally new order of things,—of a Radical Reform in the present corrupt System of the World. (PAJ 164)

Implicit in this parody is the notion that following Godwin's recommendations for a rational society will result in what Hobbes described as a life lived in the state of nature in which each individual lives in a state of perpetual war with every other individual. Charles Moor in The Robbers calls for violent warfare as a means for liberation and national honor; he cries "Liberty or Death." A review in the British Critic (January 1799) of the fourth edition of the Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner praised the paper for attacking, with unparalleled dexterity and humor, that hateful medley of ignorance, vanity, spleen, and irreligion, which under the impudently assumed mask of philosophy and candour, labours to destroy all the endearing charities of life, to weaken or tear asunder all the bands of society, and to render man a selfish, brutified, and unprincipled savage! As part of this general plan, some of these German plays were undoubtedly designed, and as the fashion of translating them was gaining ground very fast, the check given to their credit by the very just ridicule thrown upon them in the 30 and 31st numbers of the paper, may be considered of great public utility. When these originals pass through such hands as those of Mrs. Inchbald, neither their absurdities nor their poison will be permitted to remain.

Coleridge's knowledge of Schiller's Robbers dates from November 1794 when he wrote to Southey that he had been reading "this Convulsor of the
Heart": "Did he write his Tragedy amid the yelling of Fiends?—I should not like to [be] able to describe such Characters—I tremble like an Aspen Leaf—Upon my Soul, I write to you because I am frightened—I had better go to Bed. Why have we ever called Milton sublime?" (CL 1: 122). Shortly after, Coleridge wrote his sonnet "To the Author of 'The Robbers," describing Schiller as a "Bard tremendous in sublimity." In the final lines he describes Schiller as a sublime (and maybe mad) poet "Wandering at eve with finely-frenzied eye / Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood." When the poem was published as "Effusion XX" in Poems (1796), Coleridge added a note: "Schiller introduces no supernatural beings; yet his human beings agitate and astonish more than all the goblin rout—even of Shakespeare." The sonnet alludes specifically to a scene in The Robbers in which the elder Count, who had been imprisoned by his younger son so that he would starve to death, is liberated:

schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,  
If thro' the shuddering midnight I had sent  
From the dark dungeon of the Tower time-rent  
That fearful voice, a famish'd Father's cry—  
Lest in some after moment aught more mean  
Might stamp me mortal!  

(CP 1: 72-3)

The Anti-Jacobin, which had its sights on Coleridge for many months, parodied in The Rovers the same dungeon scene that Coleridge's sonnet praised. Rogero laments: "Eleven years! it is now eleven years since I was first immured in this living sepulchre—the cruelty of a Minister—the perfidy of a Monk—yes, Matilda! for thy sake—alive amidst the dead—coffined—confined—cut off from the converse of my fellow-men."21 It may be that the Anti-Jacobin's Mr. Higgins parodied it because Coleridge had praised it, but there is no doubt that the private domestic relations, which Coleridge and the Anti-Jacobin single out, had political overtones in Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France.22

When Coleridge conceived of his mariner, who is, like Coleridge's image of Schiller, a man wandering in a tempest, the context for the poem's reception was established in the public press. He intended a supernatural ballad with touches of sublime terror and thought that it would be acceptable for a liberal journal, the Monthly Magazine. When he began work on it, he was also busy recomposing and publishing some early poems and prose for the Morning Post. When Humphrey House observed that "The Ancient

21 PAJ 175. The authors of The Rovers borrow from Macbeth, who is "cabined, cribbed, confined" (III, iv, 24).

22 Coleridge wrote that "the whole system" of German drama "is a moral and intellectual Jacobinism of the most dangerous kind" (BL 2: 190).
Mariner" and "Frost at Midnight" were not at all political poems, he insisted that work on "The Ancient Mariner" "released Coleridge from some of the burden of his Miltonic responsibilities and helped to split his ambitious synthesizing aim of bringing all human knowledge together in the frame of one or more huge poems" (85). To House, escaping from the historical context benefited Coleridge's esthetic achievement, but, as Hazlitt, Jeffrey, Southey, and the reviewer for the Analytical perceived, "The Ancient Mariner" had precise political overtones. Its German sublimity resided in its gothic terror and in its extravagant, disjointed narrative. It was not merely removed from time as a "drunken dream," as Hazlitt called it in 1818 when he was attacking Coleridge for his metaphysical obscurities, "heedless of past present and to come." To many of its readers it was a Jacobin poem of violated boundaries and errant wandering. It is obviously not a poem of literal political protest in the sense that "The Vision of the Maid of Orleans" is a political poem, but its public significance was unambiguous to many readers. "The Ancient Mariner" is, in the words of the prolific Mr. Higgins, a poem of "a wild desire of undefinable latitude and extravagance."

The Extravagance of "Lyrical Ballads"

*Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 is a public volume with the extravagant themes traveling, wandering in tempests, homelessness, and vagrancy. The people it depicts are commonly without proper locations or loyalties and thus without law, either outcasts who have transgressed boundaries or convicts who are confined by them. Like the mariner, they have no recognized claim on society. The volume begins with a fantastic tale of a mythical wanderer, the mariner, and continues to tell tales of those who are isolated travelers and solitaries or who are bound in a prison: "The Foster-Mother's Tale," "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite," "The Female Vagrant," "The Last of the Flock," "The Dungeon," "The Mad Mother," "Old Man Traveling," "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," and "The Convict." The volume concludes with "Tintern Abbey," in which tempestuousness is tempered while wandering continues. Vagrancy and wandering are variations of the trope of the quest, and the volume can be read as a record of the disruptions, dislocations, displacements, regressions, and errors in a search for an individual imagination. At the same time, the trope of wandering in a tempest traces disenfranchisement, impropriety, impoverishment, and an extravagance that breaks social bonds. The exclusive attention to one or another reading of the trope, to a single discourse of esthetics or politics, or to a literal focus on explicit themes must suppress the knowledge that one discourse is figurative of another, that one individual poem echoes and recites other poems in the vol-
volume. The tropes of wandering and tempestuousness, mediated by the public discourse, allude to both imaginative quest and political disruption. If one reads exclusively for the individual imagination, the opposite of the quest is the error of wandering, of being lost on one's way. If one reads location and the public imagination, the opposite of the vagrant quest is being located, having a home, a place within society. In _Lyrical Ballads_ the poor have no location but the road or the prison.

If one discourse figures another, if the literary figures the public, the anonymous innocence of _Lyrical Ballads_ presents problems for a historical reading. The temptation to read _Lyrical Ballads_ as an escape from the historical and topical, or as a purposeful evasion of social issues, is strong because of the volume's entrancingly simple paratext, which appears to avoid public location by purely literary allusion. In contrast to other volumes of poetry published by the Bristol reformers, Coleridge's _Poems on Various Subjects_ (1796) and _Poems_ (1797), Lloyd and Lamb's _Blank Verse_ (1798), Joseph Cottle's _Poems_ (1795), Southey's _Poems_ (1797) and _Annual Anthology_ (1799, 1800) for examples, _Lyrical Ballads_ seems removed from the discursive intentions of the other volumes. _Lyrical Ballads_ was published anonymously, unsigned either on the title page or in a preface that would construct an author's public character. Although some poems, "The Nightingale" and "Tintern Abbey" among them, are spoken in the first person, and although some poems seem occasional and local, the speaking voice does not respond directly to the public discourse and is not specifically engaged in speaking to someone or some specific work beyond the volume's threshold. Many poems are narrowly dialogic with two voices or characters speaking within the boundaries of individual poems, but none are addressed to other public characters and none overtly use public genres, like the letter, to forge connections with the public discourse. The volume's characters are most often read as esthetic creations and not public figures. Despite the Advertisement's claim that some of the stories are founded on fact, the significance of the poem's figures appears to reside within the imaginations of both author and sympathetic reader as much as they do in the social consciousness.

_Lyrical Ballads_ avoids the appearance of being public in the way that the other volumes of Bristol poets are literally public by their signatures, addresses, and allusions. The brief, warning Advertisement of 1798 offers it as an esthetic transgression and a stylistic experiment to determine "how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" (i) and while the revolution in style that this implies, inevitably read through the expanded Prefaces of 1800 and 1802, suggests the selection of diction, the phrase emphasizes the "language of conversation." One might inquire what kind of conversation _Lyrical Ballads_ contains. Don Bialostoski has argued vigorously for a
Bakhtinian interior dialogic reading poems, but can the word *conversation* be extended outside the volume? The phrase hints that the poems are in conversation with others. Further, while the Advertisement and later Preface sympathize with classes whose speech has been excluded from serious and elegant poetry, the issue of language has generally been deflected to questions of poetic style.

The literary, however, here as elsewhere in the public discourse, cannot be separated from other discourses; its very literariness and paratextual simplicity locate *Lyrical Ballads* in a significant present. While the poems in the volume contain footnotes admitting their debts to Young, Milton, and Collins, the Advertisement situates the volume's origins in early English poetry:

> It will perhaps appear to them, that wishing to avoid the prevalent fault of the day, the author has sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity. It is apprehended, that the more conversant the reader is with our elder writers, and with those in modern times who have been the most successful in painting manners and passions, the fewer complaints of this kind will he have to make. (iii)

The prefatory note on "The Ancient Mariner" as an imitation of the style and spirit of "the elder writers" emphasizes the association that Charles Burney thought at best misguided. To be "conversant" with the elder writers is not only to locate oneself in literary history, but also, as Burney suggests, to re-site oneself within the public discourse that valued Pope, Dryden, and Johnson, the Tory satirists who influenced the wits of the *Anti-Jacobin*, as the models of poetic excellence and as the defenders of established order. To select the style of Chaucer's age, as Burney insisted, was to regress to a barbarous age, but it was also to select a native poetic tradition in opposition to the neoclassical style of Tory apologists. For example, in his preface to his four-volume *Life of Chaucer, The Early English Poet* (1803), William Godwin concluded his list of reasons for studying and valuing Chaucer with a similar opposition:

> It seemed probable also that, if the author were successful in making a popular work, many might by its means be induced to study the language of our ancestors, and the elements and history of our vernacular speech; a study at least as improving as that of the language of Greece and Rome.24

Godwin's *Chaucer* is not a political tract, although it does share Horne Tooke's interest as stated, in *The Diversions of Purley* (1798), in deriving an

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English grammar from a native tradition. In most places it is difficult to assign a political ideology to his discussions of the genres of romance or of the state of society, although he locates Chaucer and his age within an idea of history as a progressive liberation from ignorance, superstition, and tyranny:

It has been well observed that the English language rose with the rise of Commons; an event which first discovers itself in the reign of John, and which was ascertained and fixed under Edward I. Chaucer perhaps perceived, and was the first to perceive, that from this era the English tongue must necessarily advance in purity, in popularity and dignity, and finally triumph over every competitor within the circuit of its native soil. (1: 334)

Godwin’s argument that the English language “rose with the rise of Commons” acknowledges that language and liberty prefigure one another. Poetry and politics advance together, as they did in Dante’s Italy, and Godwin defends Chaucer as a court poet favored by patronage, because he avoided praise of military glory associated with the classical poets, in the public discourse of the day a thinly veiled allusion to the Tory Satirists:

When he compliments his patrons in what may be called his laureat compositions, it is a courtship or a marriage, a personal misfortune or a death, which he selects for his topic; and not achievements in arms, or the robbery and desolation of unoffending thousands. We shall be guilty of great injustice to Chaucer, if we do not recollect, among his most honourable commendations, the feature by which he is thus singularly distinguished from the whole band of the Greek and Roman bards his masters, the trouviers and troubadours his contemporaries, and the Italian poets who came after him and who constitute the principle glory of the sixteenth century. (2: 221)

The Anti-Jacobin, as I have mentioned in Chapter 3, contrasts “the old poet” who is a “warrior, at least in imagination” with the Jacobin poet who would sing the praises only of Buonaparte. Chaucer in this context is not quite a Jacobin poet, but he possesses a Godwinian and Coleridgean distaste for war. Described in this manner, Chaucer would be a Jacobin poet in Burke’s eyes, even though Godwin praised at great length the virtues of chivalry as a progressive social force. Leigh Hunt had no doubt. He wrote in the Examiner for March 9, 1817 that Chaucer was a “Reformer in his day,” and “set his face both against priestly and kingly usurpation.” The allusions to “the elder poets,” which Burney read as allusions to Chaucer, have their contemporary political significance in their obvious opposition to the rhetoric of neoclassical literature and Tory satire. As late as October 1821, Blackwood’s remained a bit testy about Godwin’s Chaucer. In an article titled “Chaucer and Don Juan,” it complained:
The restless gloom of the philosophical idealist overcasts the page, which might have been the light and elegant memorial of the poet. And instead of dissertation and inquiry concerning these most frightful of all chapter-heads—the feudal system and the middle ages—we might have been presented with a narrative suitable to the gay and mercurial temper of its subject.

Godwin, it seems, was a cultural critic.

The allusive and mediated tropes of wandering and tempest echo the private within the public at the same time that they describe the figurative links between the discourses of esthetics and politics. The composition of the volume in the spring of 1798 indicates that the tropes of wandering and vagrancy were an organizing principle. The poem that Wordsworth referred to as “Salisbury Plain” was transformed into “The Female Vagrant.” “Salisbury Plain” was completed in the spring of 1794, but the version printed as “The Female Vagrant” contains nine stanzas at the end, not in the first version of “Salisbury Plain,” that describe the woman’s vagrancy in England after her ship returns. They detail her hunger, madness, rest in the hospital, and a brief stay with gypsies. In “Salisbury Plain,” although the woman suffers great losses, she is not literally a vagrant as she is when she returns “homeless near a thousand homes” (79). It is difficult to determine when these stanzas were added. The manuscript evidence is inconclusive, but there is some probability that revisions were made shortly before Lyrical Ballads was completed, with the idea of re-siting the poem in the volume. They are stylistically more mature. Wordsworth handles the verse form with less of the tortured syntax and awkward inversions of the earlier drafts. In the spring of 1798, Coleridge and Wordsworth proposed several different volumes to Cottle. When they referred to the poem, it was as “Salisbury plain,” not “The Female Vagrant,” as though it were the poem of 1794. In March 1798 Coleridge asked Cottle whether he would publish “Wordsworth’s Salisbury Plain & Tale of a Woman,” probably some form of “The Ruined Cottage” (CL 1:400). Later, on May 9, Wordsworth wrote to Cottle, “I say nothing of the Salisbury Plain, ’till I see you, I am determined to finish it, and equally so that You shall publish,” which may indicate that he was contemplating revisions not completed at that date. Still later, on May 28, Coleridge wrote to Cottle that “W. would not object to the publishing of Peter Bell or the Salisbury Plain, singly” (CL 1: 411). The continued reference to the poem as “Salisbury Plain” and Wordsworth’s promise to finish it may indicate that it had not yet been transformed into


CHAPTER FOUR

"The Female Vagrant." If in March Wordsworth was thinking of "The Female Vagrant" in its early stages as "Tale of a Woman," it had not yet become "The Female Vagrant." The evidence is not conclusive that Wordsworth added the stanzas on vagrancy and changed the title to "The Female Vagrant" late in the spring of 1798 with the purposes of *Lyrical Ballads* in mind, but if he did revise it then, they may have shaped the volume to explore the very social issues of vagrancy and homelessness that he is accused of ignoring.

Elsewhere I have argued that the primary source of "The Ancient Mariner" may be found in Wordsworth's tentative revisions of "Salisbury Plain," specifically in three stanzas drafted in 1795 at Racedown describing the sailor's exasperated commission of a crime, the fear and guilt that plagues him, and the brief restoration of a "second spring," which is followed by a return of terror:

27

THE TEMPESTS OF LYRICAL BALLADS

A hovering raven oft did round it fly
A grave there was beneath which he could not descry\(^{28}\)

The parallels between the two poems are numerous, but one of the most interesting parallels for the purposes of reading literature in the public discourse is the presence of a tempest in both. In "The Female Vagrant" the woman leaves with her family for the American Wars and a storm drives them to war:

But from delay the summer calms were past.
On as we drove, the equinoctial deep
Ran mountains-high before the howling blast.
We gazed with terror on the gloomy sleep
Of them that perished in the whirlwind's sweep,
Untaught that soon such anguish must ensue,
Our hopes such harvest of affliction reap,
That we the mercy of the waves should rue.
We reached the western world, a poor, devoted crew.

(75)

The word *devoted*, according to the *OED*, means both "dedicated" and in an archaic sense "doomed."

In both "The Ancient Mariner" and "Salisbury Plain" a tempest drives the crew to death and desolation and serves as the transition between the security of an ordered society and the extravagance of wandering. The Latin root of *tempest*, a word used in the eighteenth century specifically for social unrest, is *tempus*, a marked and limited time or space, the origin of *temple*, *tense*, *temporality*, *temper*, and *temperate*. and most importantly, *tempest*. The Bastille, after all, was stormed, yet in *Lyrical Ballads*, the tempests are not the irrational actions of an intemperate mob, as common representations would have it. Ronald Paulson writes that "the imagery of the phenomenon of the Revolution itself merged the powerful natural force (Robespierre's *tempête révolutionnaire*, Desmoulins's *torrent révolutionnaire*) with the indistinguishable, vague indeterminate shape of the sovereign people."\(^{29}\) In *Lyrical Ballads*, however, tempests are the inevitable result of tyrannical acts. Those caught in the tempests are persecuted and pursued by them. The mariner leaves his own country, when his shifting perspective on the church leads him to see the church, the temple, fall into the sea, but his leaving becomes a fall from the temple into a tempest, which drives him to cross the line, the boundary, and transforms him into a wanderer both in and out of

\(^{28}\) Gill, *The Salisbury Plain* (above, n. 25) 115–16. I have simplified Gill’s transcription. Note that the gaps are authentic to the original text.

temporality and historical time. He is in history because he is driven by the tyrannical storm; he is extravagant; and he crosses the boundaries of legitimate order. The female vagrant suffers a similar fate. She loses her home, her legitimate place in society, and falls into an endless vagrancy. The last that her father sees of her home as he leaves with his daughter is “the steeple tower, / That on his marriage-day sweet music made” (72). The narrator of “The Thorn,” an old sea captain, first sees Martha Ray when he is driven to seek shelter from a storm.

With the innumerable filiations between “The Ancient Mariner” and “The Female Vagrant,” one can read *Lyrical Ballads* as a volume whose themes of wandering and vagrancy intricately involve the discourses of both history and individual imagination, such that distinctions between the public and the private become obscured. The trope of the Romantic imaginative quest finds its opposite in errant wandering, which sometimes halts the quest but also disperses it. The quest continues in immeasurable repetition, both in the sense that it is unpredictable and that it cannot be bound. The failure of the quest is not marked by regression, because the boundaries once crossed cannot be redrawn to mark the *tempus* of an origin; the failure is traced in aimlessness. The thirteen-book *Prelude* is the *narratio* of the mental traveler who transits the boundaries of a childhood *tempus*, who is lost both in innumerable tempests of “redundant energy” that vex “its own creation” and in tempests of the French Revolution, who recalls spots of time as reflections of an original *tempus*, and who is tempered. “The Ancient Mariner,” “The Female Vagrant,” and other poems in the volume can and have been read by themselves as quest narratives, but they are also legendary *narratio*, the rhetoric of the public discourse as read by contemporaries. A full reading of the volume should elaborate the poems’ public geography, both as they are located in an existing discourse and as they are received by reviewers, a discourse that maps its location between poles of the boundaries of social order, with dungeons that parody an original *tempus*, on the one hand, and extravagance on the other. Most early reviews of *Lyrical Ballads* contrast order and disorder, the bound and the unbound, the temperate and the tempest.

In their locations as *narratio*, the tempests in “The Ancient Mariner” and “The Female Vagrant” are both the elements of the biography of a failed quest narrative and of a historical present that forges its own past. Wandering in a “tempest-swinging wood,” as Coleridge described Schiller, is not only an allusion to Dante and Spencer’s Wood of Error, but a transformation of wandering from a moral and spiritual state to a state of both revolutionary energy and disenfranchisement and desolation. The trope of tempest is further complicated because in its historical present, in marked time, and in the public discourse, the tempest is construed as boundless extravagance. The storms throughout *Lyrical Ballads* efface its literary bound-
aries. To fall is to fall into temporality, into history, and quest narrative as narratio is public romance in its historical location. Just as the Romantic lyric poem has its origins in the public genre of the letter, so romance in its locations and dislocations of tempus and tempest has its public and historical place, whatever its improbable plot and figuration may suggest to literalist readers. By its nature, public romance is deeply rooted in its time and its geography.

The narrative form within Lyrical Ballads is public romance. The mariner and the female vagrant begin their narratives, not with childhood and not to find an origin for their individuality, but within a defined physical space of social order. The issue in both is not the influences of childhood on intellectual and imaginative growth, but the change from a defined social geography, dominated in both poems by a church steeple, an emblem of marriage, the Burkean foundation of local and national unity. The home of the female vagrant is the cottage with its garden, and its security rests on her father's "little range of water" (72). The legitimate private security of landed possessions, however, rests in the power of established property to expel others. To be in society is to be located within a geographical tempus. To be cast out so that the wealthy can expand their own location is to be banished into a tempest, to fall into temporality. Established order describes its place through banishing others. Order defines itself by disorderly acts of exclusion, and the illusion of privacy, of a stable tempus, is dispelled by expulsion. By being cast out, the private becomes the public, since it was always public in the first place, in the first tempus.

In "The Female Vagrant" the ocean storm is only a prelude to the tempest of war:

Oh! dreadful price of being to resign
All that is dear in being! better far
In Want's most lonely cave till death to pine,
Unseen, unheard, unwatched by any star;
Or in the streets and walks where proud men are,
Better our dying bodies to obtrude,
Than dog-like, wading at the heels of war,
Protract a curst existence, with the brood
That lap (their very nourishment!) their brother's blood.

The pains and plagues that on our heads came down,
Disease and famine, agony and fear,
In wood or wilderness, in camp or town,
It would thy brain unsettle even to hear.
All perished—all, in one remorseless year,
Husband and children! one by one, by sword
And ravenous plague, all perished: every tear
CHAPTER FOUR

Dried up, despairing, desolate, on board
A British ship I waked, as from a trance restored.

Yet does that burst of woe congeal my frame,
When the dark streets appeared to heave and gape,
While like a sea the storming army came,
And Fire from Hell reared his gigantic shape,
And Murder, by the glistening gleam, and Rape
Seized their joint prey, the mother and the child!
But from these crazing thoughts my brain, escape!
—For weeks the balmy air breathed soft and mild,
And on the gliding vessel Heaven and Ocean smiled.

(76–78)

Being cast out, the vagrant’s husband can only serve the violent purposes of those who cast him out. He becomes a victim to the wars of the American Revolution. Being a private soldier in the British army serving those in the public sphere is here a poignant contradiction.

The private catastrophe was read by the public voice of reviewers as a public issue. Charles Burney in the *Monthly Review* (June 1799) acknowledged that “The Female Vagrant” was

an agonizing tale of individual wretchedness; highly coloured, though, alas! but too probable. Yet, as it seems to stamp a general stigma on all military transactions, which were never more important in free countries than at the present period, it will perhaps be asked whether the hardships described never happen during revolution, or in a nation subdued? The sufferings of individuals during war are dreadful; but is it not better to try to prevent them from becoming general, or to render them transient by heroic and patriotic efforts, then to fly them forever?

Burney hopes that suffering in tempests is merely transient, merely temporary. The anonymous reviewer in the *British Critic* (Oct. 1799) legitimates the disordered tempest:

“The Female Vagrant” is a composition of exquisite beauty, nor is the combination of events, related in it, out of the compass of possibility; yet we perceive, with regret, the drift of the author in composing it; which is to show the worst side of civilized society, and thus to form a satire against it. But let fanciful men rail as they will at the evils which no care can always prevent, they can have no dream more wild than the supposition, that any human wisdom can possibly exclude all evils from a state which divine Providence has decreed, for reasons the most wise, to be a state of suffering and of trial. The sufferers may be changed, by infinite revolutions, but sufferers there will be, till Heaven shall interfere to change the nature of our tenure on earth.
The British Critic’s voice of legitimacy reads the unruly tempest as orderly “suffering and trial,” a view that locates justice in an age of chivalry and bases its justice upon “divine Providence.” Legitimacy’s “tenure on earth,” its geographical grip, its binding compass, thus claims a divine sanction for evil at the same time that it claims permanence for both evil and its own tenure; the view of victims caught in the tempests is that order is merely temporary and that human existence is marked by a homeless transience.

Burney’s transience of evil and the British Critic’s permanent tenure contrast sharply with the conclusions of the narratives in Lyrical Ballads. Traditional quest romance ends with either a vision of a heavenly city or the assurance of a self-recognition or personal salvation, but “The Ancient Mariner” and “The Female Vagrant” conclude with stronger statements of the permanence of wandering and transience. The mariner continues, a wanderer telling his tale that silences the hermit’s hymns, usurps the hermit’s spiritual role, and prevents the wedding guest from attending the wedding, a Burkean sacrament of national and constitutional importance. The mariner’s public message that one must love all creatures resonates with stormy German ideology and Jacobinism in 1798. The mariner has transgressed boundaries, traveled on an extravagant journey, returned briefly to interrupt a wedding with his tale, only to continue his wandering repeating it. While his tale is one of private experience, it delivers a message so public that it stuns listeners. The wedding guest listens and becomes wiser, but does not respond. To the conservative readers of Lyrical Ballads, the mariner is not as much enlightened as illuminated, and they, like the wedding guest, know that the message is public and are stunned by it.

The Female Vagrant ends her story with the prospect of endless wandering:

Three years a wanderer, often have I view’d,  
In tears, the sun towards that country tend  
Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude:  
And now across this moor my steps I bend—  
Oh! tell me whither—for no earthly friend  
Have I.—She ceased, and weeping turned away,  
As if because her tale was at an end  
She wept;—because she had no more to say  
Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay.

This conclusion of “The Female Vagrant” revises grimmer lines that end the woman’s tale in “Salisbury Plain”: “no earthly friend / Have I, no house in prospect but the tomb” (34). “The Female Vagrant,” less explicitly depressing, conveys a similar burden. The woman has no home and will have no home and consequently has no place in society. What is worse, she has no audience. She has fallen into tempests and the result is a fall into un-
bounded wandering and into a temporality that will end only in death. At the same time, she falls into her own story, her own *narratio*, her own tense. She ends with the end of her story because there is no responsive sympathy, no public discursive presence for her. The final irony of this public romance is that it begins in her youth with her private possessions, which are a mere illusion in light of the public tenure of land that supports such privacy, and that it ends with her being an outcast of that public tenure, living on the public road, but in a such a privacy that she has only her temporal location and voice for definition.

"The Female Vagrant" concludes with silence "because she had no more to say / Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay." The transient evil of war that Burney had noted as the prudent conduct of national policy is to the woman a permanent wound. "Tintern Abbey" concludes *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) with a claim that "the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lighten'd" (203). There is a tempering by nature and by the "still, sad music of humanity," which chastens and subdues. Tempering restrains excess. Within "Tintern Abbey" the tempering matures a youthful exuberance into sober imagination, but within the entire volume "the music of humanity" alludes to the burdens borne by those condemned to wander. If "the music of humanity" is read exclusively within the boundaries of "Tintern Abbey," its reference is the harmonious joy within the speaker's human heart. Its sadness is for a personal loss for which the poet finds "abundant recompense." Wordsworth himself, perhaps, is responsible for encouraging such a reading by removing "Tintern Abbey," from its context in *Lyrical Ballads* and placing it, in 1815, in the category "Poems of the Imagination." If, however, one restores it to its earlier context, it alludes to the rest of *Lyrical Ballads*. The "still, sad music of humanity" echoes the final lines of "The Female Vagrant" with a poignancy in the word *still* that remembers her final silence.30 If one pauses over the poem that immediately precedes "Tintern Abbey" in 1798, "The Convict," a poem in Jacobin dactyls that contrasts the torment of the jailed convict with the monarch who is conducted to his chamber "from the dark synod, or the blood-recking field," one finds even a note of bitterness in the allusion to humanity. The speaker of "Tintern Abbey" not only sees, feels, and remembers, he also hears—an oddly intrusive note in a poem commonly read as the utterance of an isolated consciousness. He hears the rest of *Lyrical Ballads*. Since his words allude to the female vagrant's story, he becomes her auditor. His "dizzy raptures" have matured to a more temperate joy by listening, by responding to her as well as to his sister, and he, like the wedding guest, is a "wiser" man. His eye is "made quiet" by listening, by being at-

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tentative to a public discourse of dissent represented in *Lyrical Ballads* by "The Ancient Mariner" and "The Female Vagrant." As a contribution to the public discourse, the volume anticipates its reviewers and offers its own response to the tales that contrast with those of Burney and the *British Critic.*

*Lyrical Ballads* publicizes the private anguish of the people it depicts. In some few instances, "The Female Vagrant" and "The Convict," the protest of social conditions, institutions, and classes is direct and unambiguous. Other poems repeat their major tropes, those of extravagance, wandering, tempestuousness, the crossing of boundaries, of violence and violation, yet the public significance of these figures, which crosses the boundaries between the esthetic and the political, cannot be fully read even in the volume itself. They are repeated from poem to poem, and for any single poem the rest of the volume stands as a complex paratext, and the volume echoes the public discourse. Without that allusive ground, the volume remains primarily a document in a purely literary history. With that ground, one can read it more closely within its literary period and thus with a more complex awareness of the resonances of its awareness. It is neither the pure expression of an individual imagination nor a proud assertion of autonomy, but rather an anonymous and collaborative legendary narratio in a public address, mediated by the public discourse that it implicitly addresses.