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A Place of Vision

Romantic Dream Poetry and the Creative Imagination

Anita O'Connell

PhD in English Studies
University of Durham
2006

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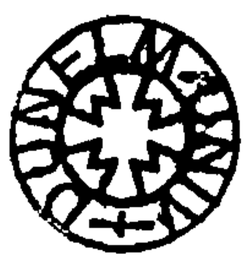

1 1 OCT 2006

"*A place of vision* where all the dreams of youthful Poets
under Trees by Brooks &c &c realized themselves"
~ Coleridge

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Abstract
Anita O'Connell
A Place of Vision: Romantic Dream Poetry and the Creative Imagination

While criticism on Romantic poetry largely recognizes the era's interest in dreams, most overlooks how central that interest is, not only to the thought of the Romantics, but also to their use of poetic form. This thesis seeks to examine the reasons why Romantic poets were preoccupied by dream poetry and what it allowed them to achieve. It looks closely at the meaning and significance of "dream" in the Romantic era, and re-examines some of the era's most central dream poems in the context of one another. The study begins with two introductory chapters that examine Romantic-era thinking about dreams. Chapter three analyzes "Kubla Khan" and shows how Coleridge creates for the reader a waking dream experience. Chapter four demonstrates how in "The Dream of the Arab" passage from Book 5 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth constructs a highly imaginative tale of romance. Chapter five discusses how Keats uses the form of dream poetry in *The Fall of Hyperion* to explore the relationship between dreams and poetry. Chapter six considers how Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* hovers between dream, vision and nightmare to shape a powerful vision of what Shelley calls "Life." The final chapter examines De Quincey's "The Dream-Fugue" from *The English Mail-Coach* as poetic prose that participates in the genre of dream poetry. In an apocalyptic vision De Quincey evokes the anxieties induced by war. The conclusion shows that the thesis leads to an aesthetic rather than materialist view of Romantic dream poetry. The study demonstrates how dream poetry served as a vehicle for major imaginative achievements in Romantic-era writing.

Declaration

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University. The work is solely that of the author, Anita O'Connell, under the supervision of Professor Michael O'Neill. A version of chapter three has been published as "Kubla Khan: The Waking Dream," *Coleridge Bulletin* 24 (2004): 29-36.

Statement of Copyright

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Overseas Research Scholarship Awards Scheme for financial support during the research and writing of this thesis.

I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Michael O'Neill, and my husband, John Maasz, for their intellectual and emotional support.

Abbreviations

References to the following works are documented parenthetically. All quotations remain consistent with the spelling, punctuation and capitalization of the edition quoted.

CBL: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. 2 vols. Bollingen Ser. 75. London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983. Vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. 16 vols. 1969-2001.

CF: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Friend*. Ed. Barbara E. Rooke. 2 vols. Bollingen Ser. 75. London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969. Vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. 16 vols. 1969-2001.

CL: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1956-71.

CLL: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*. Ed. R. A. Foakes. 2 vols. Bollingen Ser. 75. London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987. Vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. 16 vols. 1969-2001.

CM: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Marginalia*. Ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley. 6 vols. Bollingen Ser. 75. London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980-2001. Vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. 16 vols. 1969-2001.

CNB: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Kathleen Coburn, Merton Christensen and Anthony John Harding. 5 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, etc., 1957-2002.

CTT: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Table Talk: Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*. Ed. Carl Woodring. 2 vols. Bollingen Ser. 75. London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990. Vol. 14 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. 16 vols. 1969-2001.

DQ: De Quincey, Thomas. *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*. Ed. Grevel Lindop. 21 vols. Pickering Masters. London: Pickering, 2000-2003.

Ht: Hunt, Leigh. *Leigh Hunt's Literary Criticism*. Ed. Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens. New York: Columbia UP; London Oxford UP, 1956.

Hz: Hazlitt, William. *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*. Ed. Duncan Wu. 9 vols. Pickering Masters. London: Pickering, 1998.

KL: Keats, John. *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*. Ed. Hyder Edward Rollins. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958.

LW: Lamb, Charles. *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*. Ed. E. V. Lucas. 7 vols. London: Methuen, 1903-1905.

Quotations from poems by Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth are documented parenthetically and refer to the following editions unless otherwise indicated. Where the text does not clearly specify, the surname of the poet and/or the title of the poem are included in the parentheses and also refer to the following editions unless otherwise indicated.

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *The Complete Poetical Works*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Vol. 4. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Poetical Works*. Ed. J. C. C. Mays. 3 vols. Bollingen Ser. 75. London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001. Vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. 16 vols. 1969-2001.

Keats, John. *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Heinemann Educational Books. London: Heinemann, 1978.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*. Ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*. Ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill. Norton Critical Ed. New York: Norton, 1979. All quotations are taken from the 1805 version unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

In the Romantic era dream poetry experienced a resurgence of popularity unequalled in English literature since the Middle Ages. Romantic poetry demonstrates an unprecedented fascination not only with the phenomenon of dreaming, but also with the literary techniques that dream writing offered. All the major Romantic poets experimented with dream poetry, and some of the era's most definitive works take dreams as their subject or form. While criticism on Romantic poetry largely recognizes the era's interest in dreams, most overlooks how central the issue is, not only to Romantic thought, but also to poetic form. This thesis seeks to examine the reasons why Romantic poets were so interested in dream poetry and what it allowed them to achieve. It looks closely at the meaning and significance of "dream" in the Romantic era, and re-examines some of the era's most central dream poems in the context of one another. It traces the history of dream poetry and notices how Romantic poets revived the traditional form and transformed it to suit quite different purposes. This is an examination of the workings and achievements, the goals and operations of Romantic dream poetry.

Despite the significance of dreams and dream poetry to the Romantics, no published work has comprehensively brought together the dream poetry of the English Romantics in order to explore it in the context of the historical form, of contemporary dream theory and, most importantly, of each other. Several studies have looked at dreams in the poetry of a single poet. The most notable of these are Jennifer Ford's *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination*, Douglas B. Wilson's *The Romantic Dream: Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious*, Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson's *Blake's "Four Zoas":*

The Design of a Dream, Patricia Adair's *The Waking Dream: A Study of Coleridge's Poetry*, and Paul Magnuson's *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*.[1] However these works view dream poetry only in relation to other dream poems by the same poet. The same is true of discussions of dream poems in more general studies of a certain poet's works. Many insights into the poetry are missed by not viewing the dream poetry in the context of its genre. Work has been done on the subject of dreams in nineteenth-century French and Russian literature and this emphasizes the lack of research on dreams in English Romantic poetry.[2] David Perkins noticed the importance of the subject when he wrote, "To say just what readers expected in poems in this genre would be a subject for a book."[3] To date no published work has attempted to do so.

One full-length study does exist on the subject of Romantic dream poetry: an unpublished dissertation entitled "The Literary Dream in Romantic Poetry" by Bobbie Jo Allen.[4] Allen examines the dream poetry of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats in "an attempt to describe the intellectual significance of literary dreams in romantic poetry and to rediscover the contexts of the romantic revival of the dream."[5] While the aim is very similar to that of this thesis, the method and results vary significantly. The emphasis of her approach is on the history of dream theory and she focuses particularly on the "increasing pressures of Cartesean

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[1] Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Douglas B. Wilson, *The Romantic Dream: Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1993); Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, *Blake's "Four Zoas": The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978); Patricia M. Adair, *The Waking Dream: A Study of Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967); Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry* (Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 1974).

[2] See Tony James, *Dream, Creativity, and Madness in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) and Michael R. Katz, *Dreams and the Unconscious in Nineteenth-Century Russian Fiction* (London: UP of New England, 1984).

[3] David Perkins, "The Imaginative Vision of *Kubla Khan*: On Coleridge's Introductory Note," *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream*, ed. J. Robert Barth S. J. and John L. Mahoney (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1990) 104.

[4] Bobbie Jo Allen, "The Literary Dream in English Romantic Poetry," diss., U of Washington, 1996.

[5] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 2.

rationalism."[6] The work provides many insights, particularly as regards the interest of Erasmus Darwin and of Romantic poets in dream as defying both time and space. However, Allen refuses to acknowledge the literary history of the dream vision as an integral part of Romantic interest in dream poetry. My study differs in that, while I recognize the influence of dream theory on Romantic dream poetry, I assert the need to note the literary influences as well, and my emphasis is always on dream in literature rather than in eighteenth-century theory.

Allen is not alone in focusing on the theoretical context; many works that discuss dream in the Romantic era favour the history of dream theory over the poetic goals and achievements. Jennifer Ford's *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* takes this as its primary aim so that Coleridge's poetry is only rarely given mention. Ford sets out to write on Coleridge's thoughts on dreaming as expressed "throughout his marginalia, notebooks, letters and formal writings," and places her primary "focus on Coleridge's exploration of dreams and dreaming states in his notebooks."[7] Her book provides a thorough examination of Coleridge's many notebook entries and his theories on the physiology of dreaming. Chapter two of her study begins to delve into Coleridge's interest in the relationship between poetry and dreams and she recognizes his belief that poetry is a "rationalized dream."[8]

However, Ford argues against "The most familiar concept of the Coleridgean imagination [as] one which is spiritual, poetic, idealist" by focusing on Coleridge's more physical interests in dreams. She rather sees the Coleridgean imagination as having "a corporeal, physiological and often diseased existence."[9] She finds it "apt"

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[6] Allen, "The Literary Dream," i.
[7] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 1.
[8] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 35.
[9] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 5.

that Coleridge's preface to "Kubla Khan" "is acknowledged in an influential *medical* text,"[10] overlooking the broad consensus that Coleridge's preface should not be accepted as fact and that any medical text that does so is very likely to be misled. Ford never thoroughly examines Coleridge's interest in dream as the ideal or its complex relation to creativity and the processes of the imagination. She looks primarily at sleeping dreams and fails to recognize the way Coleridge often uses dream as a metaphor. More importantly, Ford does not give adequate attention to Coleridge's dream poetry. Focusing primarily on dream theory and physiology, Ford misses the richest areas of Coleridge's interest in dreams.

Alan Richardson also examines Coleridge's dream theory in his article "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind."[11] He focuses mainly on "placing the introduction to *Kubla Khan* in the context of Romantic-era speculation on the relations of the mind, body, brain, and nerves, while keeping the poem itself out of consideration,"[12] asserting that "what Coleridge describes in the introductory notice to *Kubla Khan* might be seen as the most spectacular psychophysiological experiment of his career."[13] He views "*Kubla Khan* in terms of a biology of mind"[14] with a brief nod in the direction of the poem's psychoanalytical criticism in order to draw attention to symbols that can be interpreted as a part or function of the body, but never gives a reading of the poem as a whole. While Richardson's knowledge of Romantic brain science is clear, focusing on dream theory he joins Allen and Ford in overlooking Coleridge's literary achievements in writing dream poetry.

Because Ford and Richardson focus on Coleridge's notebooks and theoretical writing, and largely ignore his and any other Romantic poetry, they present an

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[10] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 204.
[11] Alan Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," *Romanticism* 5.1 (1999): 1-25.
[12] Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 15.
[13] Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 8.
[14] Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 19.

unbalanced perspective of Romanticism and dreams. They have shifted critical attention away from Coleridge's interest in the creative, poetic imagination to a view of Coleridge's interest in dreams as largely materialist. Yet this is to deny one of the era's greatest poetic theorists his immense contribution to a creative Romantic imagination, and to reduce the brilliant poetic artistry of "Kubla Khan" and its preface to a medical tract. In this thesis I seek to challenge this now widely held view to show that, while Coleridge was indeed interested in the physiology of dreams and the interaction of mind and body, the significance of dreams for Coleridge's poetry is primarily its relation to creativity. This thesis attempts to redress the balance that such materialist critics have skewed, in order to remind readers of the importance of the creative imagination in Romantic dream poetry.

It is common for critics of dreams in Romantic poetry, particularly that of Coleridge, to over-emphasize dream theory and marginalize the literary history and poetic achievements. Yet it is even more common for critics to resort to psychoanalysis on the basis that since dreams are not comprehensible unless, some would believe, interpreted through a system such as that of Freud, the same must be true of dream poetry. By overlooking the history of the form, the conscious poetic construction involved, and the fact that written language makes dream poetry quite different from a dream, such criticisms often fail to read the poetry in the terms it requests and indeed requires.

Because many psychoanalytical critics attempt to read dream poetry according to an extraneous system of symbolic interpretation rather than according to the poem's own context and poetic voice, the readings are often obscure, reductive and misleading. "Kubla Khan" is notorious for inviting psychoanalysis with its dome, caverns, "fast thick pants" ("Kubla Khan" 1.1: 18) and fountain bursting forth read as

a sexualized landscape[15] or with its various levels being paralleled with Freud's id and ego.[16] Yet "Kubla Khan" is not alone; all dream poetry is particularly susceptible to psychoanalytic readings because it is thought to be in some way a dream. Michael Haltresht sees De Quincey's "The Dream-Fugue" as a "typical post-traumatic dream" and "Savannah-la-Mar" as an "'intra-uterine' vision."[17] Robert M. Philmus refers to Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab" as a nightmare to which the "psychological basis" is "the death of Wordsworth's father emotionally apprehended as paternal rejection" and goes so far as to suggest the possibility that the Arab's lance in rest may be read as Wordsworth's anxiety "of sexual impotence."[18] As these and other psychoanalytic readings are of specific works they are examined more carefully in the appropriate chapters. It is necessary at this stage only to mention that while many such readings exist, none is effective in reading Romantic dream poetry in terms of its literary achievements.

Many critics who do not employ psychoanalytic approaches for other types of poetry turn to this method of criticism when discussing dream poetry. Some psychoanalytical critics, such as Eli Marcovitz in "Bemoaning the Lost Dream: Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Addiction" and Michael Haltresht in "The Meaning of De Quincey's 'Dream-Fugue on … Sudden Death,'"[19] are simply misled by the poet's claim that the poem records a sleeping dream and treat the poem as if it were a straightforward account of the dream. However others, such as Norman Fruman in *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* and Douglas B. Wilson's *The Romantic Dream:*

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[15] See Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 18 for an interesting synopsis.
[16] See M. W. Rowe "'Kubla Khan' and the Structure of the Psyche," *English: The Journal of the English Association* 40.167 (1991): 145-54.
[17] Michael Haltresht, "The Meaning of De Quincey's 'Dream-Fugue on… Sudden Death,'" *Literature and Psychology* 26 (1976): 31, 35.
[18] Robert M. Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," *Papers on Language and Literature* 31.2 (1995): 194.
[19] Eli Marcovitz, "Bemoaning the Lost Dream: Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Addiction," *International Journal of Psychosis* 44 (1964): 411-425; Haltresht, "The Meaning of De Quincey's 'Dream-Fugue on… Sudden Death,'" 31-36.

Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious,[20] more consciously choose to switch from their usual critical approaches because dream poetry seems to suggest psychoanalysis more than does other poetry. The thinking behind the latter of these is that Romantic dream poetry is less consciously constructed than other Romantic poetry, that it is akin to automatic writing and more a product of the sub- or unconscious. It is possible, even necessary, to read into poetry in order to interpret what it says beyond the literal, and what lies below its surface; however, this is a characteristic of all poetry, not specifically of dream poetry. Romantic dream poetry is poetry, not a dream. If the idea for the poem was inspired by a dream, it is not unlike any poem that begins with an idea, and once the poet forms it into a written poem, it becomes a quite different entity. While I would not argue against psychoanalytic approaches to literature generally, I would argue that dream poetry does not provide "a royal road to the unconscious"[21] any more than non-dream poetry does, and that, as such, it should not be treated differently.

Douglas B. Wilson's *The Romantic Dream: Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious* is the most significant example of a critical work that turns to psychoanalysis because dream poetry is considered less consciously constructed than other poetry. Wilson employs a variety of critical approaches to examine less dream-like works such as those involving memory, daydreaming or trance, but chooses a psychoanalytic approach for Wordsworth's dream poetry.[22] His study is particularly insightful on issues of reverie and the uncanny, and his chapter on "The Dream of the Arab" draws interesting parallels with Don Quixote's dream in the Cave of Montesinos. Unfortunately, Wilson refuses to recognize that dream poetry is

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[20] Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972) and Wilson, *The Romantic Dream.*
[21] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* xiv.
[22] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* xvii.

literature, whether or not it is inspired by a phenomenon experienced in sleep, and he criticizes Timothy Bahti for treating Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab" passage "more like a literary text than a dream."[23] Wilson believes that "the Arab dream [is] a nightmare through which the poet's unconscious discloses itself"[24] and therefore looks at it "as Freud instructs us,"[25] through Freud's views on dream interpretation, self-analysis, dream contraries, wish-fulfillment, and his work "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." Wilson fails to understand that "The Dream of the Arab" is not a "nightmare," but rather a passage of poetry that depicts a dream, and as such his comments on the passage as revealing unconscious emotions like "Wordsworth's grief for his lost parents"[26] are unfounded. Wilson never truly reads Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab," but rather focuses on those aspects that he can easily adapt to fit a Freudian logic.

Wilson's work is the most relevant example of its kind for this thesis because, in the full-length work, he aims to study dreams in Romantic poetry generally.[27] However, Wilson attempts to do so by using Wordsworth as his sole example. He believes he can "gain a perspective on the oneiric moment of Romanticism" without reference to any other Romantic writers because "Wordsworth, whose use of the dream is more unobtrusive and subtle, embodies virtually all of the dream theory of his time."[28] Wilson seeks to address three questions through his study, all of which concern Romantic dream poetry generally:

> What is the connection between the affinity for dream in Romantic poetry and the paradoxical language of its dream texts? Why do

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[23] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 173.
[24] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 174.
[25] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 181.
[26] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 186.
[27] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* xi, xvii-xviii.
[28] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* xi.

> Romantic writers so often explore the creative process through dreams? And, finally, how does the Romantic dream challenge our postmodern sensibility?[29]

Yet Wilson never addresses the ways in which his findings on Wordsworth reflect dream in the era as a whole. While all poets do participate in the intellectual climate of their time, all are unique, and, as such, it is necessary to examine a selection of poets to obtain an accurate overview of dream poetry in the era generally. Because Wilson's study is limited to the works of one poet and because he reads "The Dream of the Arab" more as a nightmare than as a literary text, Wilson fails to examine Romantic dream poetry accurately.

J. R. Watson's section on "Dreams" in his *English Poetry of the Romantic Period 1789-1830*[30] gives an insightful overview of dreams in Romantic poetry. His commentary demonstrates Romantic interest in dreams and the ways in which the poets used the form of dream poetry. Yet even in this Watson feels compelled to refer to Freud and to introduce both dreams and dream poetry through Freud's definitions. It may be that Watson recognizes that working within Freud's terms can be misleading, for he refers to them only in the introduction and conclusion. Watson focuses on the ways in which the Romantics use dream in their poetry, from the visionary to inner truth and imaginative reality. His discussion emphasizes the profound relationship between dream and the Romantic imagination. In my thesis I take up many of the issues that Watson touches on in his overview.

Harold Bloom's "The Internalization of Quest-Romance"[31] is another study that bows to the compulsion to situate its discussion of dream and dream poetry

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[29] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream*, xviii.
[30] J. R. Watson, *English Poetry of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830*, Longman Literature in English Ser. (London: Longman, 1985).
[31] Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970).

within the boundaries of Freudian terminology. This often leads to distorted definitions of the Romantic ideas that Bloom discusses. Despite this, however, like Watson's study it is helpful for its view of the Romantic imagination and for the way it links dream poetry with romance. In my thesis I follow Bloom by viewing much of Romantic dream poetry as a form of internalized romance. His assertion about English Romanticism holds true for dream poetry:

> More than a revival, it is an internalization of romance, [...] made for more than therapeutic purposes, because made in the name of a humanizing hope that approaches apocalyptic intensity.[32]

Romance is at the heart of all dream poetry, but it becomes internalized in Romantic hands. It takes Romantic poets into the landscape of the mind where they can explore the relationship between dreams and imagination.

Bloom refers to all Romantic poetry in terms of romance and dream. His generalizations may not hold true for all poems in the period, but many of his assertions on dream describe the poems discussed in this thesis. His view that "In Wordsworth, the dream is rare" is proved wrong by Wilson's full-length study on dream in Wordsworth's poetry, but he is right to say, "in Keats and Shelley [...] the argument of the dream with reality becomes an equivocal one."[33] Keats and Shelley often grapple with the nature of dream in its relation to reality, though not more than other Romantic poets. Bloom's view that "The creative process is the hero of Romantic poetry"[34] holds true for dream poetry, as does his analysis of dream as the imaginative ideal, and I follow Bloom in exploring these issues through dream and romance.

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[32] Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," 5.
[33] Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," 21.
[34] Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," 9.

Grevel Lindop's article "Romantic Poetry and the Idea of Dream,"[35] discusses some of the Romantic ideas that inform this thesis. He does not attempt to present an exhaustive account of the subject, claiming only "to take a look, in however sketchy a fashion, at what the Romantics thought about dreams, and what they made of them."[36] Although Lindop looks at the "Idea of the Dream" – dream theory – he does so from a less materialist standpoint than Jennifer Ford and as such presents a more balanced account of Romantic interest in dreams. He discusses both poetry and prose, and his analysis is always precise. Limited by space for what is essentially an immense, wide-ranging subject, Lindop only begins to touch on the major issues and inevitably misses many. In particular he looks almost solely at Romantic depictions of sleeping dreams, so misses the important relationship of dream to the poetic imagination. In addition, his reading of the poetry is somewhat backwards: instead of using Romantic ideas to gain an insight into the poetry, he reads dream poetry to discover Romantic ideas.

In this thesis I reverse Grevel Lindop's method: I begin with an examination of Romantic ideas on dreams and apply my findings to close readings of a selection of dream poems. Rather than dwelling, as Bobbie Jo Allen does, on the history of ideas and of dream theory, which has now been well documented, I look specifically at what the Romantic poets and essayists say on the subject of dreams, and I examine their own theories and ideas on the phenomenon of dreaming in order to discover their interest and their goals in writing dream poetry. I outline, as Jennifer Ford does, Coleridge's extensive notes on dreaming, readdressing the balance of his interest in the physical and metaphysical that Ford misses, yet I take this further and read his poetry in light of my findings. My focus is on the literary achievements of the poetry,

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[35] Grevel Lindop, "Romantic Poetry and the Idea of Dream," *The Keats-Shelley Review* 18 (2004).
[36] Lindop, "Romantic Poetry and the Idea of Dream," 20.

and my exploration of ideas is not a purpose in itself, but rather a means to gaining a more precise reading of Romantic poetry. I seek to avoid the trap of blurring the distinction between a dream and a dream poem, as Douglas B. Wilson and many other psychoanalytical critics do; instead I emphasize the differences, drawing attention to the artistic techniques that Romantic poets used in writing their dream poetry. To this I add an examination of the history of the literary form. I demonstrate the ways in which the Romantic poets revived the Medieval dream-vision form and romance, and used them to create a very different style of poetry, but one that clearly participates in the tradition. My thesis provides a thorough examination of a selection of major Romantic dream poems in the context of literary tradition, the ideas of the Romantic poets and those of their circles, and, most significantly, not in the context of other poems by the same author as is the norm, but rather in the context of other Romantic dream poems.

It is generally accepted that Romantic poets were intrigued by dreams because dreams defy empirical philosophies. As Allen, Ford and Wilson, among others, point out, Empiricists were unable to explain thoroughly the phenomenon of dreaming, and it caused loopholes in their theories. Hobbes believed that "in *dreams* there is commonly *no coherence*, and when there is, it is by chance,"[37] and "that we dream of nothing but what is compounded and made up of the phantasms of sense past."[38] He believed that bodily sensations such as heat and cold give rise to the decaying impressions of past sense and cause the disorderly "phantasms" of dreams.[39] Locke

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[37] Thomas Hobbes, "Tripos in Three Discourses," *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. 4 (London: Bohn, 1839) 11. See also Thomas Hobbes, "Elements of Philosophy," *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. 1 (London: Bohn, 1839) 399.
[38] Hobbes, "Elements of Philosophy," 399.
[39] Hobbes, "Elements of Philosophy," 401; Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan," ed. Richard Tuck, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 14, 17; Hobbes, "Tripos in Three Discourses," 10.

agreed that dreams are caused by past sense impressions and that they form no coherent order:

> It is true, we have sometimes instances of perception whilst we are asleep, and retain the memory of those thoughts: but how extravagant and incoherent for the most part they are; how little conformable to the perfection and order of a rational being, those who are acquainted with dreams need not be told.[40]

Hartley agreed with Hobbes and Locke on these points, but added association to explain how one image gives rise to another:

> [Dreams] are deducible from the Three following Causes; *viz.* First, The Impressions and Ideas lately received, and particularly those of the preceding Day. Secondly, The State of the Body, particularly of the Stomach and Brain. And, Thirdly, Association.[41]

While Hartley's theory of Association partly explained why "We may perceive ourselves to be carried on from one thing to another in our Dreams," he still insisted that "There is a great Wildness and Inconsistency in our Dreams."[42]

The Romantics found such theories unsatisfying and were intrigued by the mysterious nature of dreams that could not be explained away so easily. They believed that the dramas in dreams are not completely without reason or simply random association. They were intrigued at the gaps in the empirical theories, wondering how sensations like hot and cold could produce such wonderfully imaginative characters and plots as occur in dreams and nightmares. They did not

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[40] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894) 135.
[41] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, ed. Theodore L. Huguelet (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966) 384.
[42] Hartley, *Observations on Man,* 384, 385.

believe with Hobbes that "IMAGINATION [...] is nothing but *decaying sense*"[43] and the mystery of dreams left the door open for more metaphysical arguments, allowing Romantic writers to stress the importance of the imagination.

While this thesis is not centrally concerned with explaining Romantic theories of the imagination, a subject that has been well documented already, it does attempt to counter Jennifer Ford's depiction of Romantic notions of dreaming as part of a "Medical Imagination"[44] by showing how dreams and dream poetry reinforce the Romantic, creative imagination. In examining Coleridge's notes on dreaming, Ford has attempted to prove that Coleridge saw the dreaming imagination as more materialist than critics had previously thought. She argues that, far from proposing a "spiritual, poetic, idealist" imagination, Coleridge believed the imagination was "physiological" and "diseased."[45] However, Ford never actually examines Coleridge's theories of the imagination in detail. Demonstrating that Coleridge was interested in the physiology of the brain does not argue against traditional ideas of the Romantic imagination as described by M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Coleridge was certainly interested in the relation of the mind to the body as well as in the creative imagination. The imagination was, to him, the faculty that unifies physical and mental experience. As James Engell says,

> [...] since the material world and human reason are governed by the same laws or ideas, imagination not only unifies the mind in one process but also *is* (or is at least part of) the creative force of eternal reason as it works in the universe.[46]

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[43] Hobbes, "Leviathan," 15.
[44] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination*.
[45] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 5.
[46] James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 341.

The imagination is not, in itself, diseased or a "Medical Imagination"[47] as Coleridge saw it; it is rather the faculty that processes and understands bodily disease as well as the nature of the eternal universe. It is both spiritual and poetic, as Engell continues to explain:

> This conclusion [outlined above] clarifies the claim that imagination in its highest sense, which for Coleridge would be the secondary imagination, is at one with "the vision and faculty divine." Imagination is the god-like human power. [...] The creative imagination presents nature in its highest sense, identical to the soul of man. The imagination is spiritual even as it works through matter, shaping it organically. In the individual, re-creating mind it is the same impulse of creation that occurs in external nature. The imagination, taken in conjunction with ideas constitutive both in human reason and in the material world, gives a unified perspective on spirit, existence, and matter.[48]

The very fact that the imagination can be aware of any diseased existence is testimony, as Coleridge would see it, of the optimal power of the imagination. It is a part of the imagination's spiritual and creative nature that it understands and unifies the mortal and physiological with the eternal and spiritual.

Coleridge is by no means alone in his views of a creative, poetic imagination. Keats's "conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition" (*KL* 1: 185) has echoes of Coleridge's primary imagination, "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (*CBL* 1:

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[47] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination.*
[48] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 341.

304), while it also incorporates the nature of the secondary imagination as "the god-like human power."[49] Despite the differences in the religious beliefs of the two poets, both see the imagination as a powerful human counterpart to an empyreal force. It is as near to divinity as mortality can know. Wordsworth too saw the imagination as "the vision and the faculty divine"[50] and essentially creative as it "intensifies and endows every situation with feeling and drama" and "*transforms* a character or an object."[51]

As such the imagination is, for the Romantics, creative of ideals. Keats asks Benjamin Bailey,

> do you not remember forming to youself the singer's face more beautiful that it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so – even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high – that the Prototype must be here after – that delicious face you will see (*KL* 1: 185).

The imagination has the power to create what is more perfect than human reality. Shelley, too, sees "the imaginative and creative faculty" (*Defence* 700) as that which is powerful enough to "glimpse a higher realm, but only briefly."[52] Poetry, "the expression of the Imagination" (*Defence* 675), is "the echo of the eternal music" (*Defence* 679); a poet "becomes an instrument of a higher melody"[53] and "participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one" (*Defence* 677). Yet for Shelley, as for Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge, poetry can never fully express the ideal as it exists in the imagination. Shelley explains,

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[49] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 341.
[50] William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth: "The Excursion" and "The Recluse,"* ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949) 1: 79.
[51] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 272.
[52] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 262.
[53] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 261.

> [...] the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results: but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet (*Defence* 696-97).

If poetry could harness that "transitory brightness" with its "original purity and force" and translate it into language, its "greatness" is impossible to imagine (*Defence* 697). Inspiration fades, however, and language restricts.

The dreaming mind, far from demonstrating merely diseases of the body and mind, is, for the Romantic poets, a means of accessing the creative imagination. Dreams were seen as the mind's own poetry, dramas that the imagination constructs in the absence of will and conscious reason. As such they helped the Romantic poets to consider the imagination as a place of vision that is essentially creative. Part of the reason why dream poetry could be seen as a fit medium for poetic explorations of the imagination is that a dream takes one into the imaginative landscape and reveals the workings of the creative mind.

Dream poetry was also important for loosening the restrictions of language on poetry that sought to describe the ideal "Prototype" (*KL* 1: 185). As dreams seem to communicate through visual symbols and images, poetry that emulates a dream may

use a language of symbols and images, as in "Kubla Khan," to allow the mind to imagine a greater meaning than is normally defined by language. As James Engell remarks in explanation of Coleridge's theory of "*creative words*,"

> A slight haziness or incompleteness of the images keeps the "continuous" mind in a state of uncertainty and prevents it from lapsing into passivity. A thing depicted with the greatest fidelity cannot haunt or allure.[54]

All poetry makes use of such words, symbols and images, but dream poetry, by nature of its lesser need for a clearly rational language, held the ability to be more suggestive. By being more elusive, Romantic poets believed, dream poetry could be more creative.

Apart from Coleridge, who admitted "I am unable to solve the problem of my own Dreams" (*CL* 6: 715) though he tried throughout his life, Romantic poets were not as interested in finding a satisfactory explanation of the imagination through dreams as they were in enjoying the mystery. The unsolvable nature of dreams left the door open for imaginative speculation. Romantic poets were interested in the mysteries of dreams because they could use the ambiguity to create highly imaginative poetry. They were able to manipulate the various possibilities that dreams suggest in order to encourage readers into a "Half-Faith" (*CLL* 1: 134) in the visionary and in a poem's truth. As Romantic thinkers they were interested in dreams because dreams provided one of the strongest arguments against Empiricists, yet as Romantic poets, the mysterious nature of dreams was valuable for far more as it presented them with a malleable and highly imaginative subject for poetry.

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[54] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 353.

While it is right to recognize the history of ideas and of dream theory as contributing to Romantic-era interest in dreams generally, the rising popularity of romance was much more influential on Romantic dream poetry than has been acknowledged. Some of the most central Romantic dream poems follow the Medieval dream-vision form closely in narrative technique, and many do so to explore the genre of romance itself. Romantic poets were interested in the form because it presented them with a literary space that allowed them to explore the imagination, creativity and dreams themselves. The Medieval form suggested many of their metaphysical interests, and it is with this literary tradition as its foundation that Romantic poets came to explore and to transform dream poetry.

One of the main attractions of dreams for Romantic poetry is that the subject could be reflected in the form. Poets could use the dream form to take readers into a literary representation of the imagination, and once there, could explore the workings of the imagination and the nature of dreams themselves. Additionally, sleeping dreams are often strange and elusive in meaning. They do not adhere to the laws of reason in waking reality. As such they lend themselves to the poetic, allowing a poet exceptionally creative licence and a poetic voice that suggests symbolic interpretation. Dream poetry presented Romantic poets with a highly imaginative literary space that both reveals and represents the processes of the imagination in creativity.

Throughout the thesis I refer to the "poetic form" of dream poetry. A glance at the poems discussed will confirm that I do not refer to "form" in the strict sense of a fixed structural pattern such as that of a sonnet. In this sense dream poetry is closer to "genre" in that it has rather "a nexus of conventions and a frame of reference."[55] Yet my usage is different from "genre" as well in that I am referring not to the

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[55] Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 10.

tradition or "category," but rather to something tangible, to the poem's structure or framework. I refer to "form" as distinct from "content," though inevitably they will always work together. For example, Medieval poets use the dream-vision form – a poetic narrative in which, after a prologue, the poet falls asleep and dreams a series of events – for political or love stories, but rarely to explore the workings of the imagination or dreams. In Romantic dream poetry poets use the form of dream to explore dreams in the content of the poem. By "poetic form" it is the structure, the framework, of the poem to which I refer.

Although Medieval dream-vision poetry has a set of traditional conventions to define it as a genre, many later works take part in the tradition without adhering to, and even challenging, the conventions, such as Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," De Quincey's "The Dream-Fugue," many surrealist poems, and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. In order to include works such as these, and at the same time avoid the problems that would occur in Romantic criticism by calling a poem both a dream and a vision, I use the larger more encompassing terms "dream poetry" and "dream literature." These terms are not new, but as their definitions differ from critic to critic, it is worth outlining my understanding of the terms.

Bobbie Jo Allen and Jonathan Carlyle Glance use the term "literary dreams" in their dissertations. Glance defines literary dreams very broadly as "conscious imitations of unconscious phenomena, shaped by both accepted opinions about real dreams and conventional representations of dreams in literature," and uses the term in relation to the dreams of characters in nineteenth-century novels.[56] Allen defines them as "those poems that include the ethos of dreams and dreaming in their settings

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[56] Jonathan Carlyle Glance, Abstract, "Gates of Horn: The Function of Dreams in Nineteenth Century British Prose Fiction," diss., U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1991.

and techniques,"[57] which causes one to wonder if it refers only to "those poems" where that leaves dreams in prose. Allen's term cannot be very useful for her purposes, however, for in the very next sentence after defining "literary dreams," she calls them "dream poems."[58] The main problem is that "literary dream" refers to a dream episode rather than to a poem. Calling a poem "a dream" will inevitably cause confusion. Additionally, because the term "literary dream" does not distinguish between a poem that takes the form of a dream and the many character dreams that occur in Romantic and nineteenth-century novels, to which could be added the character dreams within non-dream poems such as Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, it is a more encompassing term than that which is needed for her and indeed for my purposes.

Jack Myers and Michael Simms in *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms* separate the terms "Dream Allegory or Dream Vision" and "Dream Poetry" into two different citations. They define the former as

> a narrative device, popular in the 12th and 13th centuries, in which a major character falls asleep and dreams the events of the story. Usually, the characters have allegorical names such as Pride, Humility, or Death, and their actions are symbolic. The major character is usually guided through the dream by another human (as Dante is led by Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*) or by an animal (as Dorothy is led by Toto in *The Wizard of Oz*).[59]

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is the only other non-Medieval example given, but the presence of it and *The Wizard of Oz* suggests that they might have included other

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[57] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 3.
[58] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 3.
[59] Jack Myers and Michael Simms, "Dream Allegory or Dream Vision," *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms*, Longman English and Humanities Ser. (New York: Longman, 1989).

more modern works such as Romantic dream poetry. Most, if not all, definitions, such as those of M. H. Abrams's *Glossary of Literary Terms*, J. A. Cuddun's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* and Northrop Frye's *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, include Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* as an example, so that the obvious omission of it here is suspicious.[60] The latter citation in *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms*, that for "Dream Poetry," gives the definition,

> poetry either directly or indirectly based on dreams, or written in the ASSOCIATIONAL LOGIC of the dream. In the early 20th century, the Surrealists felt that the dream state should be exteriorized without being filtered through or subjected to analytical thought. André Breton and Paul Eluard wrote about the power of the subconscious during sleep in *Notes sur la Poesie:*
>
> In the poet
>
> It is intelligence waking that kills;
>
> It is sleep that dreams and sees clearly.
>
> Possibly the most satisfying way to interpret Surrealist poetry is to experience it through the body's sense, not the intellect.[61]

Romantic dream poetry is not mentioned in either of the two definitions or the examples given because it partly partakes of both yet refuses to be relegated to either one or the other category. It is not clearly allegorical as is most dream-vision poetry, yet it does use many of the narrative devices. It is not "experience[d] through the senses" in the way that the definition explains Surrealist dream poetry to be, yet it acknowledges the poetic power of the subconscious and dreams in a way that is so

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[60] M. H. Abrams, "Dream Vision," *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1999); J. A. Cuddon, "Dream Vision," *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1979); Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins, "Dream Vision," *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (New York: Harper, 1985).

[61] Myers and Simms, "Dream Poetry," *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms*.

similar it could be said to lead to Surrealism. Romantic dream poetry does not fit into either of the *Longman*'s categories because, in Wordsworth's words, it is "neither, and [...] both at once" (*Prelude* 5: 126).

However, the *Longman* and most other glossaries of literary terms do not take into account the fact that many critics of Medieval dream-vision poetry actually use the term "dream poetry" as well. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites C. S. Lewis's 1964 work *The Discarded Image* as its first example of this, quoting Lewis as saying "Every allegorical dream-poem in the Middle Ages records a feigned *somnium*."[62] Some of the Medievalist definitions are useful for finding a definition that includes Romantic dream poetry. In her introduction to *Chaucer's Dream Poetry* Helen Phillips defines dream poetry as "narratives framed by the fiction of a dream"[63] and includes not only "Kubla Khan" and *The Fall of Hyperion*, but also "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in the "genre," despite the fact that the latter of these does not have quite the same type of dream frame.[64] A. C. Spearing, in his 1976 *Medieval Dream-Poetry,* recognizes the difference between literary dreams and dream poetry that Bobbie Jo Allen does not when he says,

> Many medieval poems include, as incidents in the stories they tell, dreams dreamt either by the narrator of the poem [...] or by one of his characters [...]. But by dream-poems I mean not works of this kind, but poems whose main substance is a dream or vision.[65]

Spearing's definition is entirely appropriate, yet twenty-three years later in his introduction to *Reading Dreams*, he noted the inadequacy of his definition, and, I would add, of Phillips's definition as well:

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[62] "Dream," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).
[63] Helen Phillips, "Chaucer and Dream Poetry," introduction, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. Helen Phillips and Nick Havely, Longman Annotated Texts (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1997) 3.
[64] Phillips, "Chaucer and Dream Poetry," 18.
[65] A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 1.

In *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, I arbitrarily confined myself to poems where a dream boundary is explicitly present, but even at the time I sensed uneasily that this meant excluding others not essentially different in kind. The implication is that the dream poem, characterized by an explicit dream framework, is not a distinct genre, but rather occupies an important area in a more vaguely divided generic spectrum.[66]

Spearing may originally have had in mind only those poems framed as a dream, but his definition does not discriminate as such. Even Surrealist dream poetry could be included as "poems whose main substance is a dream or vision,"[67] but Spearing is right to notice that these are essentially part of the same generic spectrum and a definition that includes both framed and non-framed dream poetry is necessary.

When I refer to dream poetry in this thesis, my understanding of the term is similar to Spearing's definition though I would modify it slightly to read: poems in which the whole or main substance represents or textually emulates a dream. By specifying "the whole or main substance" I exclude poems like Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* that have dreams within them but which do not, like Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*, have the majority of the narrative within the dream. I refer to these as "literary dreams" or "dreams in literature." By adding "represents or textually emulates a dream" I avoid eliding the difference between a sleeping dream and a dream poem. In this thesis I use the word "emulate" to refer to the way in which a dream poem is modelled on dreams. A written poem can never exactly copy the non-textual medium of a dream, and the term should be understood as textually or verbally emulating the characteristics of dreams. I refer to "the dream-vision form" as a useful

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[66] A. C. Spearing, introduction, *Reading Dreams*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 5.
[67] Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 1.

way to distinguish between the traditional form with its set of conventions and the wider, more encompassing category of dream poetry, of which, as Spearing says, it is an important part. I follow many Medievalist critics who, like Steven Kruger in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, use the term "dream vision" as a subgenre of dream poetry[68] and "dream vision form" as the conventional framework that is often but not always part of the form of dream poetry.

There is one further distinction to make with regards to the terms used within this thesis, that is, what is meant by the word "dream." The definition of sleeping dreams used by this thesis simply follows that of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and is in line with what is commonly understood by the term: "A train of thoughts, images, or fancies passing through the mind during sleep; a vision during sleep; the state in which this occurs."[69] Yet Romantic writers do not limit themselves to this one meaning of the word, and this needs to be made explicit from the outset. The word "dream" has many different definitions from something of beauty or charm, a dream home for example, to an ambition, like a child's dream to be famous, to an ideal, such as the American dream. Throughout Romantic writing the word is used in a vast variety of ways, often suggesting more than one definition at once. The French Revolution, for example, was often called a dream, not only because it represented a hope and an aspiration, but also because it later seemed like an ideal and something beyond what could be realized – merely a dream, a hopeless cause. Throughout the thesis when I refer to the word "dream," particularly in the singular, it is as often to one of the various other meanings of the word as it is to sleeping dreams.

Dream is often used in Romantic writing to describe something beautiful or atmospheric. The adverb "dreamy" is much the same as the common usage today, as

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[68] Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 211.
[69] "Dream," *Oxford English Dictionary*.

are most of the definitions. Of Spenser's poetry Hunt says, "What at solemn, *remote*, fantastic, dreamy picture is here [...]" (Ht 426), a quotation that will be further explored in chapter one. The word dream is used in the same context often, but not always, as a metaphor. In *Table Talk* Hazlitt says, "A new sense comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again" (Hz 6: 230). Dream often connotes a luxurious, atmospheric feeling of heightened sensations, or a faraway, idyllic quality.

Equally dream might be used to signify hopes and aspirations, often, but not solely, with regard to the French Revolution. Hunt uses dream to mean aspiration in his criticism of Edward Bulwer-Lytton when he says, "It is this which injures him when he wishes to have poetical dreams of Milton [...]. How can his dreams be properly inspired by Milton, who was *cut by the circles*?" (Ht 396-7). Hunt uses it to mean a possibly but not necessarily attainable aspiration, a goal, in his critical article on "Byron, Moore and Hunt:"

> Observe. Two years ago, if you had been a suffering Reformer, if you had persevered in one long work of endeavour for human good, or what you believed to be such, and in the belief that a time would come after you were dead and gone, when the dream should be realized [...] (Ht 305).

Although in this case the dream was not, at the time, realized, it was not so much an impossible goal, an ideal, as one that either might or might not become a reality. Yet at least as often dream means an unattainable goal, a vain hope. Hazlitt demonstrates the complexity of the word in an essay on *The Excursion* when he speaks about the ideals of the French Revolution:

> But though we cannot weave over again the airy, unsubstantial dream, which reason and experience have dispelled, [...] yet we will never cease, nor be prevented from returning on the wings of imagination to that bright dream of our youth; that glad dawn of the day-star of liberty; that spring-time of the world [...]; when France called her children to partake her equal blessings beneath her laughing skies [...].
>
> The dawn of that day was suddenly overcast; that season of hope is past; it is fled with the other dreams of our youth, which we cannot recal, but has left behind it traces [...] (*Hz* 2: 120).

Hazlitt's argument is complex for many other reasons, but focusing specifically on the way he uses the word dream, one can see it move from vain hope to beautiful ideal to childish, naïve ideal barely remembered in the light of the reality of adulthood and experience. Dream can mean hope and aspiration, whether it is attainable or an unattainable ideal.

Yet by far the most common usage of the word dream, apart from sleeping dreams, is to indicate the act of imagining or something that is imagined. It may be used quite generally in place of "to think," as in Hazlitt's comment, "This is the test and triumph of originality, not to shew us what has never been, and what we may therefore very easily never have dreamt of, but to point out to us what is before our eyes" (Hz 6: 37). Or it may be used to mean daydream, to imagine, as when Keats says in a letter, give a man a passage of poetry and "let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect from it, and bring home to it, and prophecy upon it, and dream upon it – untill it becomes stale – [...]" (*KL* 1: 231). Although Keats could mean literally to dream upon the passage in sleep, as he himself did of Dante's "Paolo and Francesca" passage, it is likely he means to daydream, to imagine, for he did refer to

both as dreaming: "O that our dreamings all of sleep or wake / Would all their colours from the sunset tåke" ("Dear Reynolds" 67-68). "Dreamings" are imaginings here, whether they be in sleep or not. It is, Keats implies, much the same process either way.

Dreaming can refer, in Romantic writing, to daydreams as well as sleeping dreams, to thought and reverie, indeed to all of the imaginative processes which, according to Coleridge and Shelley, differ only in degree or force, not in kind.[70] Reverie, itself a term with complex and varying definitions in Romantic writing, is at times called dream, at others waking dream. Yet it is never thought to occur in sleep. Reverie is likewise a state of thinking or imagining, a state somewhere in a spectrum between remembering and being so lost in thought that, as Shelley, after Rousseau,[71] says, "Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being" (*On Life* 635). Although reverie is also a popular term in Romantic writing, dream and waking dream are at times used to encompass this broad spectrum of imaginative states.

This definition of dreams is not only the most common, it is also the one that has the greatest implications on the Romantic interest in dream poetry, for it is this relationship between dreams and poetry that lies at the heart of their revival of the form. Dream can refer to the state of imagining when reading or writing, or when

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[70] CLL 2: 266 and Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe* Shelley, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, vol 7 of 10 (London: Ernest Benn, 1965) 59.

[71] See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (New York: New York UP, 1979). See also Mary Wollstonecraft, "On Poetry," *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol 7, The Pickering Masters (London: Pickering, 1989) and Mary Wollstonecraft, "Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark," *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol 6, The Pickering Masters (London: Pickering, 1989).

seeing or acting in a play. Hunt complains of actors who do not achieve this imaginative state when he says,

> The modern *Juliets* are not in a room of their own; they are not in their own thoughts, not in a dream of love and grief, no more thinking of their faces than of their new shoes; they are always on a stage.[72]

When acting Hunt feels actors should be in an imaginative state of belief in the fiction. Dream describes that creative state of imagining. Likewise Lamb uses dream to refer to something imagined when he speaks of seeing a play when he was a child: "It was all enchantment and a dream. No such pleasure has since visited me but in dreams" (*LW* 1: 160). This is not simply a "Half-Faith" (*CLL* 1: 134) in a play, but rather the state of being fully captivated by the imaginative work. Here Lamb makes the parallel that is crucial for understanding Romantic dream poetry, that the most imaginative state, the state in which one can truly believe in the imaginative, the state that a poet or playwright could wish to induce in an audience for a work to make one believe in its truth, is itself accomplished by sleeping dreams. The word dream is used for this state because it is, in its essence, the same state to the Romantics, differing in degree, but not in kind.

Hazlitt too uses dream as an imaginative state in relation to acting. In "On Actors and Acting" he says,

> Players are 'the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time;' the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream; a studied madness (*Hz* 2: 151).

The actors of which Hazlitt speaks have achieved the imaginative state that Hunt's "*Juliets*" do not, but they achieve it so fully that their life is a dream, "a studied

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[72] Leigh Hunt, *Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism 1808-1831*, ed. Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (London: Oxford UP, 1950) 284.

madness" (*Hz* 2 :151). Dream is often aligned with madness as being another degree of the same kind; to be mad, in Romantic writing, is to live fully within the imagined state that is called dream, fully within the imagination. Hazlitt uses the same alignment of dream and madness when he criticizes Coleridge in later life:

> It was not to be supposed that Mr Coleridge could keep on at the rate he set off; he could not realize all he knew or thought, and less could not fix his desultory ambition; other stimulants supplied the place, and kept up the intoxicating dream, the fever and the madness of his early impressions (Hz 7: 103).

Whether the stimulants are thought to be metaphysics or opium or both, they keep Coleridge, according to Hazlitt, in an imagined state, but one that is only madness, one that is itself imagined.

The definition of dream as something imagined or the state of imagining includes another such negative context that would cause problems for the Romantics: that which is imagined must also be imaginary, and therefore unreal. It is a problem that caused more than just Keats to argue about the truth of the imagination. The word dream was easily twisted into a more negative connotation through this definition. In *Liber Amoris* Hazlitt writes to Sarah, "You once made me believe I was not hated by her I loved; and for that sensation, so delicious was it, though but a mockery and a dream, I owe you more than I can ever pay" (Hz 7: 20). Although dream here is a sensation of wonderful emotions, it is also simply imaginary and untrue. His reaction is complex because while he enjoyed the luxurious sensations, it was not reality and therefore only a mockery. Similarly in an essay "On the Past and Future" Hazlitt uses dream to mean imaginary as he aligns it with delusion. He argues about whether the past has any real existence, saying, "Do I delude myself, do

I build upon a shadow or a dream, do I dress up in the gaudy garb of idleness and folly a pure fiction [...]" (Hz 6: 19). Dream is a delusion, a belief that is untrue, pure fiction, yet it takes little manipulation by Coleridge to change delusion into illusion (*CLL* 1: 135; 2: 265-66) to describe a reader's imaginative state and to change pure fiction from that which is untrue into that which is the truth of the imagination. Dream can mean imaginary, unreal and, by extension, untrue – a strangely logical contradiction to believing in the truth of a play, which can also be called fiction. It is precisely these ambiguities, multiple meanings and circles of logic that make dream attractive to Romantic poets.

In "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats uses the ambiguity of dream to demonstrate an uncertainty about the imaginative state. After a longing to be one with the nightingale, a subsequent sympathy in which he is "Already with thee" (35), and returning "from thee to my sole self" (72), he finally asks: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: – Do I wake or sleep?" (79-80). The questions leave the poem with an unsettling feeling as they challenge the entire experience. The reader is left wondering what the difference between vision and waking dream is for Keats, and what the implications are for the truth of the imaginative experience. In *The Triumph of Life* vision and waking dream are equated as one and the same. Yet often, as for Wordsworth and Coleridge, waking dream is a daydream or a state aligned with being wrapped up in reading or writing fiction while vision is a profound experience of insight. In "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats distinguishes the two suggesting that visionary insight may be different from an imaginative state, but the question mark and lack of answer insist upon uncertainty. Keats moves from this confused position to ask another question: "Do I wake or sleep?" (80). The way in which the two questions are aligned suggests they ask the same, but neither vision nor

waking dream takes place in sleep, and the reader recognizes that Keats has shifted the questioning without resolution, just as he shifts Moneta's argument in *The Fall of Hyperion*. The question appears simple, but in fact suggests many theories that surround the idea that life is a dream and we wake into imaginative experience. In these unanswered questions Keats shows a human inadequacy to understand the power and purpose of imaginative experience. He uses the ambiguity surrounding dream to question its very nature.

Yet Keats also famously defends the dream of something imagined against the charges of being imaginary and untrue in his well-known letter to Bailey:

> I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination – What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty – [...] The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth (*KL* 1: 184-85).

The quotation is complex and much has been written on its relation to beauty and truth. What it demonstrates for dream is the profound significance Keats gives the imagination, and its relation to reality, that what the imagination believes *is* one's reality. Keats refers to Adam's dream of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, and so does not choose the word dream himself, but it is not coincidence that the state of imagining is a dream. The dream, what is imagined, is not, Keats would argue, imaginary and therefore untrue, it *is* truth.

In a marginal note Coleridge uses dream in a similar manner to Keats. He does not adopt Keats's philosophy about the truth of imagination, but he does describe a situation similar to Adam's dream:

> My Dreams were akin to Reason: but I could not awake out of my prophetic Sleep, to effectuate their objectivization – for I was ignorant of the Mathematics! (*CM* 4: 503).

Coleridge agrees with Hazlitt to an extent, that he was living in a dream and has not been able to "keep on at the rate he set off" (Hz 7: 103), but the implications of dream to him are very different. His dreams are not "fever and [...] madness" (Hz 7: 103), they are akin to reason, but he could not wake up in order to find them truth – he could not realize his dreams. His sleep was prophetic, according to him; what he imagined was true, but he could not "effectuate their objectivization" (*CM* 4: 503).

In another marginal note Coleridge again describes a similar experience to Adam's dream. Referring to a link of association that Coleridge believes some religious fanatics make between their own sensations and the stories of the Bible he says,

> In short, the Man awakens so gradually & opens his eyes by little & little to objects so similar to his Dream, that the Dream detaches itself, as it were, from Sleep, and becomes the commencing Portion of the new Day-thoughts (*CM* 5: 169).

Coleridge does not refer to the truth of imagination, but rather to the links made between what is imagined and what is experienced. Through association these people, he conjectures, believe they experience what they only imagine. As such he shows the relationship between thought (or reverie) and dream.

Coleridge's note could also describe what he called "The incomparable Passage in W. Wordsworth's incomparable Ode – Our birth is but a sleep – " (*CNB* 4: 4910) where as a child "every common sight, / To me did seem / Apparell'd in celestial light, / The glory and the freshness of a dream" because "trailing clouds of

glory do we come / From God, who is our home."[73] Sleep and dream have very different connotations, which forms another definition of dream. Here dream is not the imaginative state nor sleep the means to gaining it; dream partly describes an ethereal atmospheric beauty while sleep describes life so that one wakes into eternal life.

Others who adopt this suggestion may be said to follow Wordsworth, but this quotation leads to another more common definition of dream as life. Calderón's *Life is a Dream* (*La Vida es Sueño)* was particularly influential for Shelley, yet many of the ideas were also popular in the Romantic era generally. In a passage on the soul and creation Coleridge writes, "Alas! we not *have*, we *become*, a Dream. Well does the Hebraism express this truth, the Soul does not ~~merely~~ see Dreams; but the Soul dreameth dreams" (*CNB* 4: 5377). The implications of this statement are profound as they show how Coleridge could see the unity of body and soul and of mortal and immortal. What is significant is that he calls it all a dream. He says, with the expression, that sleeping dreams are only a small part of the larger role of dream. Likewise in his marginalia Coleridge writes "all, I can do, is but a dream, and that not myself only but that all men & all things are but Dreams, that nothing is permanent – which makes the mortality of man a stupefying thought to me" (*CM* 3: 317). The imagination may be truth but, Coleridge feels here, it does not amount to much in comparison to what is immortal. In another note concerned with his ignorance of mathematics, he yet again agrees with Hazlitt that his life has been a dream: "In a long-brief Dream-life of regretted Regrets I still find a noticeable Space marked out by the Regret of having neglected the Mathematical Sciences" (*CNB* 4: 4542). Dream describes Coleridge's life here, but because of the opposites in "long-brief," there is

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[73] William Wordsworth, "*Poems, in Two Volumes,*" *and Other Poems, 1800-1807,* ed. Jared Curtis, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1983) 2-5, 64-65.

the suggestion of a tension in "Dream-life" that dream is strangely contrary yet similar to what life might be. The way the word dream allows more than one definition to exist at once makes it useful for suggesting such tensions.

The seemingly simple word dream can suggest any of these definitions and their profound implications, and these are only a few examples, for there are certainly other less central definitions of the word dream in Romantic writing. The reader who reads dream only to mean sleeping dreams misses some of the most significant arguments in Romantic writing as dream is essentially bound with the imagination and all of the profound philosophies that revolve around it. Coleridge sums up the significance of the word when he says,

> – Let us do our *Duty*: all else is a Dream, Life and Death alike a Dream / this short sentence would comprize, I believe, the sum of all profound Philosophy, of ethics and metaphysics conjointly, from Plato to Fichte. – S. T. C. – (*CNB* 2: 2537).

The complexity of the word dream lies not only in these definitions, but also in the ability of the word to suggest more than one of its meanings at the same time, even, indeed especially, when those meanings are contradictory. It is this nature of the word dream that makes it so valuable in Romantic poetry.

These various definitions and uses of dream are crucial to understanding the ways in which dream is important in Romantic poetry. Sleeping dreams are significant for demonstrating the natural creativity of the imagination, and they provide an imaginative landscape in which Romantic poets explored the processes of the creative mind. Equally as important is dream meaning that which is imagined, a visual ideal in the mind, for it is this that Romantic poets used the lawlessness of dream poetry to emulate. By making use of the elusive, highly imaginative nature of

dream poetry, Romantic poets could stretch the bounds they felt language placed on representations of the dream. It helped them to best describe, as they believed, the vision of the imagination.

The title of this thesis comes from one of Coleridge's notebook entries:

> *A place of vision* where all the dreams of youthful Poets under Trees by Brooks &c &c realized themselves (*CNB* 4: 4795).

While Coleridge has other interests in the entry, the quotation touches on issues that are central to Romantic dream poetry. It recalls the Medieval dream-vision form with its "youthful Poets under Trees by Brooks &c &c," yet this is embodied within the specifically Romantic concern for the imagination as "*A place of vision*" where dreams and dream poetry are realized. "*A place of vision*" describes the imagination as a place of sight and of insight, the theatre of the mind and a place of profound understanding, where dreams are visualized in an inner imaginative experience and where, through the creative process, they are transformed into an outward linguistic expression in poetry.

In chapter one of this thesis I examine Romantic use of the word dream, arguing that dream was important for its relationship to romance and poetry. When Romantic poets sought to explore these ideas of dream in their poetry, they turned, quite naturally, to the dream-vision tradition. The chapter examines the roots of this tradition, the reasons why the Romantics became interested in it, and what they achieved through this choice of form. I begin by tracing Romantic interest in dream poetry to the rise in popularity of the Medieval dream vision and romance as it culminates in Spenser. I argue that the Romantics found in the dream-vision form a heightened creative freedom with which to explore the lawlessness of romance. The chapter moves on to examine dream in Romantic essays, prose and poetry and argues

that dream is integrally bound with creativity and imagination. To the Romantics dream was the state of imagining, the state one achieves when reading, composing poetry, or watching a play performed. As such it was considered the ideal in a poet's imagination that poetry seeks to transform into language. Through this chapter I explore the intricacies of this relationship between romance, dreams and poetry.

While the history of dream theory in philosophy is well documented, the theories and interests of Romantic writers are far less so. Yet the Romantics were prolific on the subject of sleeping dreams. In chapter two I examine the nature and significance of dreams to Romantic writers in order to understand better the questions they pose and the possibilities they suggest in their poetry. Byron's "The Dream" begins with an overview of the characteristics of dreams that covers many of the era's dream theories, and I use this part of the poem as a guide to trace the thoughts of Romantic poets and essayists on dreaming. By examining the many questions that the Romantics consider on the nature of dreams – whether they are prophetic, visionary, inner truth or nonsense – I show that the main concern for poets was not to find a single theory to explain the phenomenon of dreaming, but rather to explore the mysteries of dreaming and make use of the ambiguity and suggestiveness that dream presents for poetry.

With the history of dream poetry, the relationship between dreams and poetry, and Romantic thoughts on the nature and significance of dreams as my foundation, in chapters three to seven I give detailed readings of a selection of dream poems in the light of my findings. Dream poetry became immensely popular in the Romantic era and it would be neither possible nor desirable to examine all such poetry. Instead I have chosen to read some of the most well known and arguably some of the greatest poetic works in the era in order to show what can be gained by recognizing their

participation in the tradition of dream poetry. The sequence of events in the works discussed demonstrates the ways in which each author explores the form of dream poetry. It is for this reason that I have chosen to read each work as it unfolds. The four poems that I examine in detail, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," Wordsworth's "The Dream of the Arab" passage from *The Prelude*, Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* and Shelley's *The Triumph of Life,* are all central to the Romantic movement and follow to some extent the traditional dream-vision form. These poems have been chosen because of their centrality, because they are considered major Romantic poems and have been written on extensively. In this way I am best able to outline what critics have missed by not fully understanding the implications of dream in Romantic poetry. Each of these poems explores dreams in poetry for different reasons and in very different ways so that this selection provides an overview of the vast range of dream poems in the Romantic era.

In chapter three I examine the role of dream in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and demonstrate how the dream frame technically affords Coleridge extended poetic freedom because readers do not expect a dream to adhere to the strictures and rationale of poetry. Coleridge believed that the aim of a poet was to create a state of illusion for the reader that is akin to dreaming: as in the dreaming state when a dreamer never questions the dream, a poem should persuade readers to suspend their disbelief. In this chapter I argue that in "Kubla Khan" Coleridge emulates the state of illusion in dreaming in order to create for the reader a waking dream experience.

In chapter four I examine "The Dream of the Arab" passage from Wordsworth's *Prelude.* I argue that Wordsworth uses the poetic freedom, the lawlessness, of dream poetry to create a highly imaginative tale of romance that at once explores and dispels the anxieties expressed in book five of *The Prelude* for the

endurance of the great works of the imagination. Through the passage Wordsworth shows that dream and imaginative fiction are natural teachers of fear. In the chapter I demonstrate that in writing a dream poem Wordsworth becomes a writer of romance, one of those he calls "Ye dreamers [...] / Forgers of lawless tales" (*Prelude* 5: 547-48).

The dream-vision form by its very nature presented the landscape of the dreaming mind, and as such was ideal for poetry that sought to explore itself and its relation to dream. In chapter five I examine *The Fall of Hyperion* and demonstrate how, as Coleridge did with "Kubla Khan," Keats uses dream poetry to explore itself, to explore dream in its relation to poetry, and to examine the one crucial difference between them: language. I argue that Keats writes of a regretful acknowledgement that progression is necessary – an acknowledgement that although dream is the ideal, it must be transformed into poetry and shared.

In chapter six I argue that *The Triumph of Life*, presented in the dream-vision tradition, hovers between dream and vision, between the frames of Chaucer and Dante, in order to explore, as did Cicero in *The Dream of Scipio*, a biting political and social commentary. Shelley uses dream and nightmare to create the eerie beauty of the "shape all light" and the valley of perpetual dream, and the horror of the pageant of life. In the chapter I argue that dream is not only the medium for the poet's remembering and forgetting, not only the imaginative landscape of the narrative, it is also the very fabric, the atmosphere of poetry. Shelley emulates the dream experience to create visionary poetry.

As my final example I have chosen De Quincey's "The Dream-Fugue" passage from *The English Mail-Coach* as a selection from one of the Romantic era's major dream writers. The piece is written in De Quincey's most poetic prose and as

such it belongs as much to the genre of dream poetry as it does to the nineteenth-century's literary dreams in fiction. In *A Defence of Poetry* Shelley said,

> An observation of the regular mode of the ocurrence of this harmony, in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony which is its spirit be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much form and action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification. The distinction between poets and prose-writers is a vulgar error (679).

De Quincey innovates in structure, just as Shelley suggests. "The Dream-Fugue" has a poetic harmony, a relation to music (as its title suggests), and its own rhythm, though it does not observe a regular poetic meter. Its language is symbolic and its message universal. It does not read as literal prose nor as a story might in prose fiction, but rather in the same way that one might read "Kubla Khan." It blurs the distinction between poetry and prose, and agrees with Shelley that the distinction in this case "is a vulgar error" (679). De Quincey's prose style in "The Dream-Fugue" is one of the ways that he modifies and makes original his participation in the genre. It is because "The Dream-Fugue" is as much poetry as it is prose that it is included in this selection of Romantic dream poetry.

In chapter seven I examine how De Quincey's "The Dream-Fugue" emulates dreams in order to present a richly textured, politically and emotionally charged

sequence that suggests symbolic interpretation. The piece uses dream and music-in-language (what is essentially poetry) to explore the public and private emotions of England at war. In the chapter I demonstrate how, by using the dream form in literature, De Quincey is able to express the anxieties of a time of social and political upheaval, and attempt to bring the extremes of emotion, the excitement, the pride and the horrors of war, to a final resolution.

"The Dream-Fugue" deals explicitly with Romantic issues using dream to rehearse the anxieties of the Napoleonic Wars for a generation who, he felt, could no longer remember it. De Quincey's thoughts on dreams are quintessentially Romantic and treating him only as a Victorian writer would be to deny one of the biggest influences on dreams in Romantic writing. Yet at the same time "The Dream-Fugue," written in 1849, more than fifty years after "Kubla Khan," serves also to show how dream poetry progressed into the next era and serves as a comparison by which to see how the techniques the poets employed would change.

The works chosen, written in 1797, 1804, 1819, 1822 and 1849 respectively, provide an overview of dream poetry throughout the Romantic era. The selection provides some insight into contemporary issues on dreams and poetry. However, this is only a selection and as such cannot be entirely representative of Romantic dream poetry as a whole. Other poems might equally have been included. Blake's *Four Zoas*, Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," Shelley's *Queen Mab* and *The Mask of Anarchy* and Byron's "Darkness," among many others, might have been chosen, and it is hoped that the findings of this thesis may be applied to future readings of these and other works of Romantic dream literature.

In each of the main five chapters I examine the ways in which the poem participates in the traditional form of dream poetry and the reasons for doing so,

before examining through a close reading the techniques that the poet employs and what the poem achieves. By looking closely at how the poem participates in the tradition, I am better able to say in what ways it modifies and makes it new. Each reading focuses on the ways in which the poet uses dream in the poem, highlighting the poet's thoughts on dreams and the relationship between dreams and poetry. The close reading carefully examines the poetic techniques that dream provided the poet with, and results in a better understanding of what gives each poem the quality and the essence of dream poetry. It is through this process that I reveal the workings and the achievements of Romantic dream poetry.

Chapter One

Dreams and Poetry

To Romantic poets dream poetry presented a highly imaginative literary form that could both reveal and represent the processes of the imagination in creativity. With their close connection to the pure imagination untainted by waking reason, sleeping dreams were often seen as the imagination's independent creations of fiction and fantasy. By writing poetry in the semblance of a dream, Romantic poets could explore creativity to its furthest extent and experiment with the imaginative. With dream poetry they could create a climate for the visionary, explore ideals, and transform the boundaries of subjective reality. Many of the Romantic writers saw dreams as a metaphor for poetry, and as such, recognized that dream poetry presented them with a highly suggestive, versatile form in which they could explore the imagination in creativity through the relationship of romance, dreams and poetry.

Dream poetry has a literary tradition that stretches back to Homer and that became a form unto itself in the Middle Ages. Well-versed in Medieval poetry and romance, many of the Romantics recognized in Medieval dream poetry a form that would create a space conducive to what they sought to explore, while aligning themselves with the roots of English poetry. Chaucer, heralded by Romantic writers as the first great English poet, wrote four dream poems, while others such as *The Flower and the Leaf* were then attributed to him. To the Romantics, traditional dream poetry was also related to romance through their mutual Medievalism as well as through the heightened creativity that each afforded, and the combined influence of these genres on Romantic dream poetry extends far beyond the form.

In her unpublished dissertation "The Literary Dream in English Romantic Poetry," the only other full-length critical work on Romantic dream poetry, Bobbie Jo Allen belittles the role that the literary tradition plays in Romantic dream poetry, denying the influence of the Romantics' literary predecessors. Allen dismisses the significance of Medieval dream poems saying the "romantics did not revive them without substantial changes that go beyond tinkering with conventions."[1] Rather she argues that Romantic literary dreams are a response to Cartesian rationalism. Allen's dissertation unfortunately remains narrowly focused, tracing, as she says, "a history of an idea."[2] While Allen makes some interesting observations, the answer to why the Romantics were prolific writers of dream poetry – the answer she is seeking – cannot exclude the history of dream poetry. Romantic interest in dreams is certainly linked to contemporary development in science and philosophy and there is also present, at least for Coleridge, an interest in language and universal symbolism. However of equal importance to Romantic dream poetry is the resurgence of interest in Medieval dream poetry, in chivalric romance, in Chaucer, Dante and Spenser, as well as interest in the imagination as the source of creativity, and in the very nature of poetry.

Dream visions have appeared within larger poems and prose works since Antiquity. Both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of Homer have several dreams within their narratives, most of which tell of a god or ghost who appears to the dreamer to convey a message. The most influential of Homer's literary dreams for later dream poetry, Penelope's dream of the geese, was the oldest known allegorical dream in literature. Each of Homer's literary dreams are pivotal to the plots of the poems, occurring during times of crisis or when the dreamer is in need of advice in order to make an important decision. Virgil's *Aeneid* also features several literary dreams that

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[1] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 8.

have been influential to dream poetry, many of which are, as in Homer, of god-sent messages. To these are added Turnus's nightmare of the Fury, the appearance of the god of Sleep, and the visit to the underworld, which ends with the suggestion that it was in some respect a dream. Ovid has one literary dream within *The Metamorphoses* that was influential for Chaucer, becoming the subject for *The Book of the Duchess*. In Homeric tradition, it too is of a god – or rather a son of the god Sleep – who appears to the dreamer with a message.

Of the Classical literary dreams, it was probably Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* that had the greatest influence on the form of Medieval dream poetry. After conversing with King Masinissa on kingdom and commonwealth, Scipio falls asleep and dreams that he is visited by his deceased grandfather. Africanus teaches Scipio the ways of the universe, the merits of commonwealth, and reveals the future to him through the medium of a dream. Though it actually forms the final section of Cicero's *Republic* as inspired by the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*, and is therefore a literary dream within a larger prose work, *The Dream of Scipio* was passed down to Medieval poets appended to Macrobius's *Commentary on "The Dream of Scipio"* "at a time when the rest of [Cicero's *Republic*] was lost." Macrobius's widely read commentary "was the vehicle whereby [*The Dream of Scipio*] became known as a separate text."[3] Read as a complete work in itself, Cicero's dream vision appeared to Medieval poets to be a dream-framed prose piece in which the narrator, near the beginning of the tale, tells of falling asleep, and which has for the majority of its narrative a dream sequence.

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[2] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 2.
[3] J. G. F. Powell, "Somnium Scipionis: Introduction," introduction, *Cicero: "Laelius, On Friendship" ("Laelivs de Amicitia") and "The Dream of Scipio" ("Somnivm Scipionis")*, by Cicero (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1990) 132.

This narrative form in which most of the prose work or poem is within the dream frame came into its own in the Medieval era when it became popular across Europe. *Roman de la Rose* begun by Guillaume de Lorris and continued by Jean de Meun, the Gawain poet's *Pearl*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and the *Prologue* to *The Legend of Good Women* are only a handful of the many Medieval dream-framed poems. The form was used in a few works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, notably in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Irish Aisling poems. However it was the influence of the Medieval dream poems during a time of unrivalled popularity that accounts for the prolific use of the form in the Romantic era.

In Chaucer's dream poetry, the dream is only one of a series of frames that he uses to take his reader deeper into the poetic landscape, yet it is the one that most appealed to and influenced Romantic poets. In the Romantic era, dreams were already being hotly debated in contemporary philosophy. They presented to poets an immensely intriguing phenomenon and one that could not be fully rationalized. The dream frame when used in literature served to create a compellingly suggestive poetic space in which there are few limits or laws to what could be explored. Romantic poets found in Medieval dream poetry a form that by its nature takes the reader into the imagination, suggests psychological allegories, allows scope for the poetic qualities of an atmospheric dreamscape, and is so versatile as to present almost limitless possibilities for exploration.

Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats all make use of the dream-framing device in certain poems. In these instances, the poets were drawing on the Medieval dream-poetry tradition and showing their influence in a manner that could

not be mistaken by contemporary readers. They were placing themselves firmly in a literary history and aligning their poetry with that of their predecessors. These poets did not seek to rewrite Medieval dream poetry; they used the form for their own individual explorations. However, it is wrong to dismiss altogether, with Bobbie Jo Allen, the influence of the tradition. Many Romantic poems achieve a dream space without the use of the framing device, and it is significant, therefore, to recognize that those poems that do have a traditional frame are creating distinct parallels with Medieval dream poetry within the mind of the reader.

Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* is often noted by Medieval critics and editors of literary glossaries[4] as having one of the most traditional dream forms in post-Medieval dream poetry. Keats follows Medieval poets in his use of multiple frames that lead deeper into the dream, and in his use of "Methought" as the signal for his first dream frame (*The Fall* 1: 19). His arbour scene is reminiscent of the gardens in Medieval dream poetry following *Roman de la Rose,* which heavily influenced most Medieval dream poetry.[5] It also recalls most of Chaucer's first frames, which take place in forests or meadows and the temple in Keats's second frame recalls the Churches and temples in the second frames of *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame.* Following his predecessors, Keats uses the frame to enter an otherwise realistically unreachable place: the fantastic world of the Titan and Olympian gods, which is made credible by its existence as an imaginative and fictitious world in a dream rather than as objective reality. Recognizing that in dreams the impossible can be realized, the reader is readily able to accept the tale of the gods. Writing in the form of a dream-framed poem is also a clear signal that the

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[4] Phillips, "Chaucer and Dream Poetry," 18; Abrams, "Dream Vision," *A Glossary of Literary Terms*; Cuddon, "Dream Vision," *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*; Frye, Baker and Perkins, "Dream Vision," *The Harper Handbook to Literature.*

poem should be read allegorically. While Romantic poetry never uses allegory in quite the same way as earlier poetry, *The Fall of Hyperion* is far closer to allegory than to the type of symbolism in "Kubla Khan." As a dream poem, *The Fall* urges readers to interpret the narrative and read it with other levels of meaning. While other Romantic dream poems are also read in this way, Keats comes closer to a fully comprehensible allegory than most Romantic poets. Keats wrote several poems influenced by the Medieval era and he deeply admired Chaucer; it should come as no surprise that his dream poem has enough similarities to be noticed by Medieval critics.

The build-up to the frame in Keats's poem is an argument on the relationship of poetry and dreams, which may loosely recall to a reader's memory the preliminary argument in Chaucer's *The House of Fame*. Before relating his dream, Chaucer's narrator discusses dreams and their significance. Listing the many different kinds of dreams – "avision," "revelacion," "drem," "sweven," "fantome," "oracles"[6] – he contemplates the mysteries of how and why we dream. Although he does not argue outright that dreams are prophetic, visionary, or otherwise significant (stating in true Chaucerian style only that it is beyond his comprehension), he recalls religious visions and ancient prophecies in order to plant the possibilities in the mind of the reader. The suggestiveness gives weight and significance to what he boasts has been the most wonderful dream ever dreamt by man. Thus Chaucer uses the dream-framing device to present his poem with import.

Byron's "The Dream" is presented in much the same way: as a dream-framed poem that rests its credibility on suggestions regarding the nature and significance of

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[5] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Harry W. Robbins (New York: Dutton, 1962).
[6] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 7-11.

dreams. Like Chaucer, Byron also does not commit to any specific belief as what appears to be an argument in the opening section of the poem reveals underlying ironies and shadows of doubt cast upon each assertion. Nevertheless it too puts forth possibilities of significance, arguing that dreams "look like heralds of eternity" (11), "speak / Like sibyls of the future" (12-13), and that "they have power" (13), as an attempt to give his own dream-framed poem visionary status.

"The Dream of the Arab" in Book 5 of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is more akin to the classical form in that it is a dream within a larger work and does not, as with the Medieval dream-framed poems, present the majority of the narrative within the frame. In this respect it is most like Cicero's dream vision in form, being an episode that can be separated without too much damage to the meaning it conveys. Both visions are understood more fully in context, yet they are not wholly dependent on that context as are many literary dreams in fiction.

However, "The Dream of the Arab" is also highly influenced by Medieval dream poems. The dreamer (whether that be the "friend" (5: 49) in the 1805 version or the "I" (5: 56) of the 1850) tells of reading *Don Quixote* as well as of thinking about "poetry and geometric truth" (5: 64) before falling asleep. In his subsequent dream, each of the subjects of his thoughts reappears in an altered but recognizable state. Dreaming of what has been read or thought about before the dream is a technique familiar in the literary tradition. Cicero's Scipio associates his dream with the conversation he had before falling asleep saying that, "it often happens that our thoughts and conversations give rise to something in our sleep."[7] As C. S. Lewis points out, "This little attempt to give plausibility to a fictitious dream by offering

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[7] Cicero, *Cicero: "Laelius, on Friendship" ("Laelivs de Amicitia") and "The Dream of Scipio" ("Somnivm Scipionis")*, ed. and trans. J. G. F. Powell (Warminster: Aris, 1990) 137.

psychological causes is imitated in the dream-poetry of the Middle Ages."[8] Chaucer too provides realistic causes for the dreams in his poems. The narrators of *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls* both dream events similar to or paralleled with those of which they had been reading before falling asleep. In the latter poem it is explained that, whether wish-fulfilment or anxiety dreams, people often dream of what is foremost in their minds or in their lives:

> The wery huntere, slepynge in his bed,
>
> To wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon;
>
> The juge dremeth how his plees been sped;
>
> The cartere dremeth how his cart is gon;
>
> The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;
>
> The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;
>
> The lovere met he hath his lady wonne.[9]

Yet Chaucer never commits to any one explanation. He rather leaves the question unanswered saying, "Can I not seyn if that the cause were / For I hadde red of Affrican byforn / That made me to mete that he stod there."[10] Readers may choose to believe that the dream was visionary and that Africanus truly came to him, but sceptics may choose the alternative explanation that he simply dreamed of what was foremost in his mind.

Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab" is also like Chaucer's dream poems in the use of a literary parallel. Wordsworth's dreamer, reading from *Don Quixote* prior to falling asleep, dreams of a strange figure on horseback, who is at once Don Quixote and an Arab of the desert, and who is on a quest to bury and save from destruction by

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[8] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 23.
[9] Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 99-105.
[10] Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 106-8.

deluge two books of poetry and geometry. By drawing a parallel with Cervantes' mad hero, he highlights both the valiant nature and the irrationality of his longing for the endurance of man's achievements. In Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* the dreamer had been reading Ovid's tale of Ceyx and Alcyone[11] and subsequently dreams of a knight whose tale of love and woe is aligned with that of Alcyone. In *The Parliament of Fowls* Chaucer's dreamer, having read Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio*, dreams that Africanus appears at his bedside and, as had happened to Scipio, shows him the ways of the world and of the heavens. In each case the poet makes use of an associative dream in order to reflect the themes of an older, well-known tale.

While English Medieval poetry and its forms increased in popularity in the Romantic era, so too did interest in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. C. P. Brand reveals that it was not only interest in Medieval poetry, but also the opening up of Italy and a subsequent rise in the popularity of Italian literature that paved the way for Dante's popularity.[12] The influence Dante had on Chaucer and Milton, who in turn were exceptionally influential for the Romantics, will have added to this. Besides these two poets, Dante had never before been a major influence on English writers,[13] yet in the Romantic era Dante became widely read and *The Divine Comedy* had a large impact on several major works including *The Fall of Hyperion* and *The Triumph of Life*.

Although it is only one small part of Dantean influence, it should be noticed that all three of these poems are in some respect framed by a dream. While most definitions and discussions of dream visions include *The Divine Comedy*, Kathryn

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[11] The version Chaucer suggests is being read is a reinterpretation and translation by Guillaume Machaut's *Dit de la Fontaine.* See Gillian Beer, *The Romance*, The Critical Idiom 10 (London: Methuen, 1970) 2.
[12] C. P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1957) 2-3.
[13] Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics*, 53-54.

Lynch says that most "close students" of the poem would agree that the whole is neither a dream nor a vision.[14] However, as Kathryn Lynch reveals,

> Even in contemporary reception it was often read as a dream, indeed by Dante's own son, Pietro Aligheri, who interprets the poet's opening comment that he is "full of sleep" [...] as evidence that the poet intends the external structure to be that of a dream.[15]

In addition, the Rev. H. F. Cary's 1814 [16] translation that was praised by Coleridge and read by Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, among others, was entitled *The Vision*. *The Divine Comedy* draws on book six of *The Aeneid*, which also has a loose suggestion (in the final lines) that the journey has been a dream. It may be, as Lynch suggests, the fact that Dante incorporates "in a most thorough way many of the conventions of the philosophical vision, often couched as a dream" that leads many to view the poem in this way.[17] While it is possible to argue that it may not accurately be called a dream-framed poem or dream vision, *The Divine Comedy* does, by having often been read as such, contribute to the literary history of the form.

Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* draws on *The Divine Comedy* in many ways, as well as Petrarch's *Triumphs (Triomfi),* which also follow the dream-vision form. However, if Shelley was drawn to the apparent dream form of these poems, he has also been influenced by other Medieval dream poems as he creates a more definite frame. As with many conventional dream-framed poems, the narrator reclines on a hillside in daylight. Yet the poem within the frame is not a dream, but rather a

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[14] Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and the Literary Form* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988) 148. Among those that do include *The Divine Comedy* as a dream vision are such dictionaries as: Abrams, "Dream Vision," *A Glossary of Literary Terms*; Myers and Simms, "Dream Allegory or Dream Vision," *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms*; and Cuddon, "Dream Vision," *A Dictionary of Literary Terms.*

[15] Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision,* 147.

[16] Subsequent editions appeared in 1819, 1831 and 1844. See Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics,* 55.

[17] Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision,* 148.

"Vision" (40), a "waking dream" (42). His thoughts are laid to sleep, but he insists that he is not – it is a trance, not slumber (29-30). The fact that it is not a dream the poet experiences, but rather a vision, gives the poem heightened significance. The dream frames of Chaucer, Keats and Byron are partly used to give added weight to their poems. If a dream may be a religious vision as Chaucer suggests, a prophecy as Byron suggests, or a vision from the soul of man as Keats suggests, then by presenting a poem as a dream, it is claiming visionary status. Shelley bypasses the argument that a dream may not be prophetic, but rather confused, random and nonsensical images, by presenting the poem directly as a vision. Yet Shelley's frame is no less traditional than are those of Keats and Byron. In *The Fall of Hyperion* the word "Methought" (1: 19), a common indication that the narrator is relating a dream, occurs earlier than the more obvious dream frame, and the narrator seems already to be in a dream of some sort before falling asleep. The abandoned feast that he stumbles upon does not appear to be one of this world, and the events leading up to the frame are unlike the realistic events in Chaucer's poems. Byron's frame is also blurred: his poem is not a dream, but rather "a vision which I dream'd / Perchance in sleep" (23-24). With over two hundred and twenty-five dreams and visions (both literary and non-literary) written in the Medieval period alone,[18] it is not possible nor desirable to conform completely with the technique, and the signals that each of these and other Romantic poets give are enough to recognize their involvement in and transformation of the tradition.

"Kubla Khan" also takes part in this tradition of a form, modifying mainly just the placement of the frame. Rather than occurring in verse near the beginning of the poem as in most Medieval dream poems, the frame appears in the prose preface that

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[18] Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision,* 1.

accompanied the poem in its first publication in 1816. Although the poem existed for some eighteen years before the preface, its presentation to the public included the frame. Coleridge's frame is not unlike that of the conventional Medieval dream poem: a solitary poet spending the day reading falls asleep and dreams the events (or in this case images) of the following poem. As is often the case with dream frames, Coleridge uses an older text, *Purchas His Pilgrimage,* on the outside of the frame to plant in the mind of the reader exotic images that will transfer through, and give heightened effect, to the poem. At the same time, the mention of reading an older text prior to dreaming creates a cause for the dream in the same way that Cicero and Chaucer have been shown to do. Although the frame appears to be quite different from those of Medieval dream poems, it in fact functions in much the same way.

While "Kubla Khan" does modify the traditional dream frame more significantly, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *The Triumph of Life*, Byron's "The Dream" and Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab" make perfectly clear the form in which they are working. In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* Stuart Curran argues against "an entrenched belief that Romanticism was inherently suspicious of, even hostile to, traditional literary forms."[19] Curran outlines many of the forms and genres in which the Romantics fully participated. He does not explore Romantic dream poetry, but it might well have been included, for the Romantics did readily take up and work with this traditional literary form, following their predecessors far closer than merely "tinkering with conventions."[20] Yet this is not to say that the Romantics wrote or tried to write in the same vein as Medieval dream poetry; as with any form a poet uses it for his own purposes and creates his own poetry from it. Medieval poetry rarely examines the same subjects as Romantic poetry and the dream form was not used in

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[19] Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism,* 4.

Medieval poetry to explore the mind or imagination in the way that the Romantics often do. Yet the Romantics saw the possibilities the form offered and recognized in it a tradition that could be transformed for their own purposes. For the Romantics, the form placed them in a literary tradition, invoked the gothic atmosphere of the Medieval, suggested, through their mutual Medievalism, romance, and created a dreamspace in which the impossible could be realized.

One of the greatest attractions of dream poetry for the Romantics was the way in which it naturally suggested other experiences of highly imaginative creativity that in the period came to be synonymous with dreams, particularly romance and poetry. The word dream can be used in many different ways: to refer to something atmospheric (dreamy), something imaginary (merely a dream), or the state of imagining (lost in a dream) to name but a few. The ambiguity of the word thereby lent itself to a rich suggestiveness that could call to readers' minds any of its various meanings. More than simply following the tradition of Medieval poets, the Romantic poets were attracted to the form of dream poetry because it presented them with a forum through which to explore the relationship of romance, poetry and dreams.

Sleeping dreams are highly imaginative fictions that are often read symbolically. Their worlds are cut off from reality, even from reason. In the fables of romance[21] the Romantic poets found a literary outlet – a form of expression – for their interests in dreams, and in the subject of dreams they found an expression for romance. As many critics have shown in the past fifty and especially in the past twenty years, one of the most important and still often underrated movements in the Romantic era is the romance. Its popularity is easily seen in contemporary gothic

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[20] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 8.

[21] I use the term "romance" as the Romantics do, to include not only Medieval romance, Spenser, Ariosto, Tasso and Romantic and Gothic romances, but also fairy tales and any wildly imaginative works of fiction.

romance novels, but its influence on poetry is no less substantial. A short overview such as that by Stuart Curran in chapter six of *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* shows a staggering list of Romantic poems firmly contributing to the revival. Curran counts "[t]he number of extended metrical romances written in this relatively brief period of British literature [to] well above a hundred."[22] Linked indivisibly with the popularity of Medieval poetry, romance is one of the key literary influences on Romantic dream poetry.

Romance represented to Romantic poets a space where the imagination seems to be, if not unrestricted, then at least only minimally restricted by reason. Some of the more imaginative and fantastic elements in romance can occur nowhere in reality except in dreams. Dreams have their own strange laws and strange logic that make sense within their own space, but cannot always be transferred to reality. And yet dreams are real phenomena that are experienced in reality. With dreams, the Romantics could blur or displace the boundaries of the real and the imaginary in the same way as in romance.

The autonomy of dreams and their laws gave poets a creative freedom when writing dream poetry. They were not restricted to the rules of more rigid forms, but more than that, they were not restricted to the laws of reality. Many Romantic poets and critics readily confessed they did not know what "Kubla Khan" was about, but enjoyed it anyway. Thomas Medwin quotes Byron as saying,

> "Madame de Staël was fond of reciting poetry that had hardly any thing but its music to recommend it."
>
> "And pray," asked I, "what has 'Kubla Khan?'"

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[22] Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 132.

"I can't tell you," said he; "but it delights me."[23]

Hazlitt confessed the same, writing publicly: "*Kubla Khan* we think, only shews that Mr Coleridge can write better *nonsense* verses than any man in England. It is not a poem, but a musical composition. [...] We could repeat these lines to ourselves not the less often for not knowing the meaning of them" (*Hz* 9: 25-26). Because dreams do not adhere to the waking rationale, poetry that emulates a dream would seem more dreamlike for its inconsistencies. Lamb says, "There is no law to judge of the lawless, or canon by which a dream may be criticised" (*LW* 2: 65). When there are no set rules to the logic of a dream, dream poetry has extensive creative freedom. De Quincey uses this argument to defend the lines on Waterloo in "The Dream-Fugue" saying,

> Waterloo, I understood, was the particular feature of the 'Dream-Fugue' which my censors were least able to account for. Yet surely Waterloo, which, in common with every other great battle, it had been our special privilege to publish over all the land, most naturally entered the Dream under the license of our privilege. If not – if there be anything amiss – let the Dream be responsible. The Dream is a law to itself: and as well quarrel with a rainbow for showing, or for *not* showing, a secondary arch. So far as I know, every element in the shifting movements of the Dream derived itself either primarily from the incidents of the actual scene, or from secondary features associated with the mail. [...] But the Dream knows best; and the Dream, I say again, is the responsible party (*DQ* 20: 35).

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[23] Thomas Medwin, *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1966) 178.

De Quincey is able to displace any criticism about his work by saying it was only a dream and he had no control over it. The responsibility for the logic, or seeming lack of logic, of the text does not lie with him, he is able to say, because "The Dream is a law to itself" (*DQ* 20: 35). The Romantics justified the highly imaginative fables of romance in much the same way. Romance and fairy tales, too, have their own laws, as fantasy does not adhere to reason. Lamb says, "What stops the Fiend in Spenser from tearing Guyon to pieces – or who had made it a condition of his prey that Guyon must take assay of the glorious bait – we have no guess. We do not know the laws of that country" (*LW* 2: 65-66). Tales of magic and imaginary beasts have their own unique laws. Through the lawlessness of dreams and romance, Romantic poets were able to express themselves with an extensive degree of creative freedom.

The Medieval is bound up with Romantic romance partly because some of the literary romances that the Romantics drew upon were Medieval, but also because the Medieval period was itself a distant world that could be portrayed as both historical and mythic. Since the 1760s with the publications of Macpherson's *The Works of Ossian*, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, and later Chatterton's *Poems Supposed to have been Written by Thomas Rowley*, remote ages were transformed in fiction and became, in a sense, romance. History presented writers with dream worlds – places cut off from reality by time, but with such a firm base in reality as to create the believable. The Medieval era was both closer in time and more distant through less familiarity than the Classical and, as such, it created a climate of mystery and intrigue. The romance of the Medieval grew to include numerous gothic novels, some of the historical romances of Scott, *Christabel*, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," *Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, "The Eve of St. Mark," and many more Romantic works.

In her dissertation, Bobbie Jo Allen discusses the forged histories created by Macpherson and Chatterton as dream worlds. Their influence, she says, "provide[s] more penetrating answers to the reasons why the romantics experimented so extensively with literary dreams"[24] – "more penetrating," we must assume, than Medieval dream poetry. What Allen misses, however, is the larger picture: both the mythic histories and Medieval dream poetry are single elements contributing to their wider interest in romance. While Macpherson and Chatterton do play a significant role, partly in helping to create the romance of the Medieval and other remote times, they are not alone. Scott plays a vital role in linking the dream of history with romance: in Scott, as in other Romantics, when the historical blends with the mythic, it becomes romance. The dream of history, Allen fails to realize, is, to Romantic eyes, romance.

It was not only the remote mysteriousness and its mythic history that caused the Medieval period to be considered romance. The values demonstrated in its literature were projected onto the period itself and the era of the literary romance became synonymous, to some, with the values of romance. In *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, A. W. Schlegel argues that whereas the ancients revelled in the joys of life, Europeans after the rise of Christianity began to question their actions and their thoughts when faced with a religion that "claimed an authority over the whole inward man and the most hidden movements of the heart."[25] Through Christianity and its "moral independence," Schlegel argues, there arose in the Middle Ages the virtues of chivalry, "honest heroism," and a "purer spirit of love."[26] In Hazlitt's 1816 review of Schlegel's *Lectures*, Hazlitt, without disagreement, explains

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[24] Allen, "The Literary Dream," 93. Allen also discusses at length the fictitious voices that MacPherson and Chatterton created for their poetry, and the influence on the Romantics.
[25] A. W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black, rev. A. J. W. Morrison (London: Bohn, 1846) 25.

Schlegel's argument focusing more than Schlegel does on the characteristics of romance:

> This interval of time might be accordingly supposed to give birth to all that was constant in attachment, adventurous in action, strange, wild and extravagant in invention. Human life took the shape of a busy, voluptuous dream, where the imagination was now lost amidst 'antres vast and deserts idle;' or suddenly transported to stately palaces, echoing with dance and song (*Hz* 1: 277-8).

The Medieval era, as Hazlitt here expresses it, is itself a romance and the human lives are its chivalrous characters. He says they lived in a "voluptuous dream" (*Hz* 1: 277), a world that supported and expressed itself with the imagination. Hazlitt is very close to Schlegel's intended meaning; however, Schlegel speaks only of the "poetry of nature" and "the romantic spirit."[27] While it may not be his own opinion, it is Hazlitt who aligns the era with dreams and the imagination.

Medieval dream poetry and chivalric romance were influential for the aura of romance surrounding what was remote and mysterious in settings as well as for the values and customs demonstrated by the poems. Yet there is a greater connection between dreams and romance in the Romantic era. The words are often used interchangeably and each was able to represent the other in certain contexts. Both words could express something imagined or imaginary, something airy and faraway. Hunt uses the word "dreamy" to describe a passage in Spenser's romance, *The Faerie Queene*. After quoting Book 1, Canto 1, 39-41 when Archimago sends a spirit to the house of Morpheus, Hunt says, "What at solemn, *remote*, fantastic, dreamy picture is here [...]" (*Ht* 426). The word "solemn" (*Ht* 426) complements "*remote*" (*Ht* 426)

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[26] Schlegel, *Dramatic Art and Literature*, 25.

giving to the faraway a dark, still, serious, and silent quality. The emphasized "*remote*" (*Ht* 426) and the element of fantasy are key characteristics of romance and each conjures an intrinsic part of the passage's description as such. The word "dreamy" (*Ht* 426) is appropriate because it refers to Spenser's description of the house of the god of sleep, yet alongside "*remote*" (*Ht* 426) and "fantastic" (*Ht* 426), it is also a key element. It defines one of the primary qualities of the essence of romance. Another example of dream used in the context of romance and poetry is in a poem Keats wrote to Reynolds: "O Phœbus, that I had thy sacred word / To shew this castle in fair dreaming wise" (30-31). "[D]reaming wise" (31) describes an imaginative, highly poetic, romance style of writing. Keats expresses a longing for the words of Phœbus to make music of his poetry and he hopes that his poetic style will have the spirit of romance. Romance, the imaginative and the poetic are all suggested here by the word dream.

Dreams and romance are synonymous in many ways, the most significant of which is in their relation to the imagination. Romance was often thought of in the Romantic period as highly imaginative fiction and fantasy. A dream is what writers of Romantic romance might seek to emulate. However romance was not subordinate; a writer might conversely use a dream to emulate or to create the imaginative fiction of romance. Romance could be used to expose the workings of the creative mind in dreams or a dream to show the creative process in writing romance. Likewise, both dreams and romance could represent and be represented by poetry. Romance and poetry were both considered exceptionally imaginative and, in the greatest works of their kind, they demonstrated the highest level of creativity in literature. Almost a

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[27] Schlegel, *Dramatic Art and Literature*, 26.

common metaphor in the Romantic era, poetry was often called a dream.[28] Not only could a poet strive, as with romance, to emulate the imagination's own independent form of creativity, but he could explore poetry itself in its own near-mirror image through dream poetry. Each of these words is weighty and complex in itself. When used in the context of each other, the interwoven connections push open the boundaries of suggestion. It is this relationship between dreams, romance, poetry and imaginative creativity that is the key to understanding why Romantic poets were prolific writers of dream poetry.

Coleridge's lectures are perhaps the most familiar comments on the relationship between fiction and dreaming. In his 1808 *Lectures on the Principles of Poetry* Coleridge moves between the subjects of stage illusion and dreams quite freely, establishing certain similarities and using dreams to demonstrate his argument on theatre. Coleridge insists that the aim of the theatre is to produce illusion, not delusion, because the audience knows, for example, that the forest scene is not a real forest. The "true stage Illusion," he argues, "consists not in the mind's judging it to be a Forest but in its remission of the judgement, that it is not a Forest" (*CLL* 1: 130). Likewise in dreams, he continues, we do not "judge the Objects ~~for~~ to be real. The fact is, [...] that we simply do not ~~i~~ determine, that it is unreal" (*CLL* 1: 130). Coleridge's discussion here of the "temporary Half-Faith" (*CLL* 1: 134), an important pre-cursor to the *Biographia Literaria*'s "willing suspension of disbelief" (*CBL* 2: 6), uses dreaming as its example. In the lecture Coleridge continues for several pages discussing the lack of surprise and the easily shaken fears as similar to the state when reading, watching a play, or "composing a Faery Tale" (*CLL* 1: 132). Dreaming, to Coleridge, is an experience parallel with those of fiction.

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[28] See for example *CBL* 2: 217-18; *CNB* 2: 2086; *Hz* 1: 157; *Hz* 2: 166; *Hz* 2: 205; *LW* 2: 187-89.

An important and frequently quoted passage from Coleridge's 1818-19 *Lectures on Shakespeare,* in which he re-addresses the issue of illusion, establishes the relationship between dreams and fiction more precisely. To demonstrate his ideas about illusion, he again turns to "the highest degree of it, namely, Dreaming" (*CLL* 2: 266). Coleridge reiterates the ideas he had explored ten years earlier on the suspension of judgement again using dreams as an example. Yet he then precisely defines the relationship: "Our state while we are dreaming differs from that in which we are in the perusal of a deeply interesting Novel, in the degree rather than in the Kind [...]" (*CLL* 2: 266). While he had before named some of the similarities, he now details the differences: reading fiction differs in that it produces less vivid images in the mind, in that sensations are not cause but effect, and in that "We *chuse* to be deceived" (*CLL* 2: 266). Dreaming is described as a similar but more intense experience. The two states are of the same kind, but dreaming is more vivid and represents the "highest degree" of illusion (*CLL* 2: 266). Dreaming is the most pure experience of imaginative fiction.

The relationship of dreams and the imagination was intriguingly complex in the Romantic era. At the most basic level vivid dreams could be seen, either seriously or light-heartedly, as the sign of an active imagination. In "Witches, and Other Night-Fears" Lamb says,

> For the credit of my imagination, I am almost ashamed to say how tame and prosaic my dreams are grown [...]. The poverty of my dreams mortifies me. There is Coleridge, at his will can conjure up icy domes, and pleasure-houses for Kubla Khan, and Abyssinian maids, and songs of Abara, and caverns,
>
> Where Alph, the sacred river, runs,

> to solace his night solitudes – when I cannot muster a fiddle (*LW* 2: 69).

Lamb reflects a common conjecture that dreams show the capabilities and the power of the imagination. Dreams are linked to the imagination in various ways – here it is through their ability to create. In the same essay Lamb continues,

> The degree of the soul's creativeness in sleep might furnish no whimsical criterion of the quantum of poetical faculty resident in the same soul waking. An old gentleman, a friend of mine, and a humorist, used to carry this notion so far, that when he saw any stripling of his acquaintance ambitious of becoming a poet, his first question would be, – 'Young man, what sort of dreams have you?' I have so much faith in my old friend's theory, that when I feel that idle vein returning upon me, I presently subside into my proper element of prose [...] (*LW* 2: 69-70).

Although Lamb's friend who sees dreams as criteria for a poet is a humorist who takes the notion "so far" (*LW* 2: 69), Lamb is interested enough in the idea to at least draw the connection between the creativity in dreams and the waking imagination. If he seems to only half believe it, and feels confident enough to admit his own dreams are ineffectual, he nevertheless takes pains in several pages of the essay to ensure the reader knows that his childhood dreams were highly imaginative and that those now are more so than he would modestly admit.

Hazlitt broaches the same topic in his essay "On Dreams" when he says,

> Coleridge used to laugh at me for my want of the faculty of dreaming; and once, on my saying that I did not like the preternatural stories in the Arabian Nights (for the comic parts I love dearly), he said, 'That

> must be because you never dream. There is a class of poetry built on this foundation, which is surely no inconsiderable part of our nature, since we are asleep and building up imaginations of this sort half our time.' I had nothing to say against it [...] (*Hz* 8: 20).

Hazlitt is quite defensive about the criticism insisting "Yet I dream sometimes" (*Hz* 8: 20), giving some rather weak examples of his dreams, and finally deciding that his love of Rousseau must compensate: "I do not dream ordinarily; and there are people who never could see any thing in the *New Eloise*. Are we not quits!" (*Hz* 8: 21) Though some, like Lamb, could joke about the relationship of dreams and poetic creativity, the parallels between them were often spoken of as so strong and complex that it was difficult to entirely dismiss the associations.

By Hazlitt's account, Coleridge places appreciation of *The Arabian Nights* on the faculty of dreaming. If one does not dream, he does not have the creative faculties necessary to sympathize with such highly imaginative fiction. The "class of poetry built on this foundation" (*Hz* 8: 20) certainly brings to mind several of Coleridge's own poems, and is suggestive as to Coleridge's intentions when producing the supernatural in his poetry.

Although we cannot be certain that Coleridge said exactly what Hazlitt relates, he did several times draw parallels from *The Arabian Nights* to dreaming. In his 1811-12 lecture "On the Arabian Nights" he says that when reading them, "there is the same activity of mind as in dreaming, that is – an exertion of the fancy in the combination and recombination of familiar objects so as to produce novel and wonderful imagery" (*CLL* 2: 191). Not entirely different from his discussions on the similarities of fiction and dreams as previously mentioned, Coleridge adds here the element of the supernatural or fantasy. Not only is reading similar in that it produces

images in the mind and is involved with sensations and a suspension of judgement, but when reading fantasy the mind creates, in the same way as do dreams, an object that does not exist in reality. Reading romance and fairy tales requires the same actions of the mind, according to Coleridge, as does dreaming.

When Hunt wrote his comments on Hazlitt's *The Plain Speaker*, he included a discussion of Hazlitt's "want of the faculty of dreaming" and his dislike of "the preternatural stories in the *Arabian Nights*" (*Hz* 8: 20). Hunt follows Coleridge in what is, by Hazlitt's account, his criticism. Hunt argues that,

> The Arabian Nights appeal to the sympathy of mankind with the supernatural world, with the unknown and the hazardous, with the possible and the remote. It fetches out the marvellous, included in our common-places. Surely this in an universal sympathy [...] (*Ht* 246).

Although Hunt does not here align *The Arabian Nights* with dreams, his description recalls both romance and dreams. Just as Coleridge had apparently said it was through dream-like imagining, Hunt insists that it is through fantasy and its combination of possible truth and pure fiction that *The Arabian Nights* appeals universally to readers.

Many writers in the Romantic era associated fiction and fantasy with dreams, yet the relationship was seen to be so strong that many took it much further, calling poetry itself a dream. The idea was not new: Shakespeare more than once says as much; but its re-emergence into public consciousness had a significant impact on theories about poetry, on definitions of the word dream, and on the writing of dream poetry. In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge says,

> The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and

> with our judgment *perdue* behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only, not to *dis*believe (*CBL* 2: 218).

The poem creates a dream within the imagination, but as a poem only comes to life in the imagination, the very poem too is itself a dream. As in sleep, the reader lays his judgement to rest and follows the poem into the dream.

The dream of poetry is insubstantial and intangible, yet to Romantic writers it is something that does exist and something that can be lost. Although Coleridge publicly aligned theatrical performances and dreams,[29] the theatre was more than once targeted for dispelling the dream. In Hazlitt's essay "The Midsummer Night's Dream," he explains why:

> Poetry and the stage do not agree well together. The attempt to reconcile them in this instance fails not only of effect, but of decorum. The *ideal* can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective: every thing there is in the fore-ground. That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality (*Hz* 1: 157).

When read, the poem is "an airy *shape*, a dream" (*Hz* 1: 157; my emphasis) – it *is* something, even if that something is not tangible. The word dream is effective because it is a noun – a *thing*, yet it is also airy and intangible. Hazlitt says that a poem creates in the mind a "thought," an "*ideal*" (*Hz* 1: 157). Neither substantial nor existing in reality, that which poetry creates is nonetheless something. When Hazlitt is discussing poetry as a dream elsewhere, he quotes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Shakespeare describes the dream of poetry:

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[29] See for example *CLL* 1: 130-36; *CLL* 2: 264-66.

> And as imagination bodies forth
>
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
>
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
>
> A local habitation and a name.
>
> Such tricks hath strong imagination.[30]

Poetry gives shape to "airy nothing."[31] It takes what the "imagination bodies forth" and gives it "A local habitation and a name."[32] And yet even when named it is still, Hazlitt would say, a dream. It is fiction and an ideal, but it is an "airy shape" (*Hz* 1: 157) rather than an "airy nothing."[33]

Lamb, too, sees the dream of poetry as something that exists and that can be lost. Where Hazlitt gives the poem more depth than the play (a poem is the picture's perspective (*Hz* 1: 157)) then turns around and calls it "*merely* an airy shape, a dream" (*Hz* 1: 157; my emphasis), Lamb expresses certainty that the dream has by far the greater depth. When a play is read, the imagination forms ideas without distinct images, but which are more ideal, more perfect than anything man could create on a stage. After seeing a play performed, Lamb complains, he will thereafter always imagine the actor. He says,

> When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that instead of realizing an idea, we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance (*LW* 1: 98).

One may think that he has no mental picture of a literary character and wish to bring him into the objective world, but, Lamb is saying, that character can only exist in the

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[30] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1979; rpt. 1986) 5.1: 14-18.
[31] Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1: 16.
[32] Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1: 14; 17.

mind. The play, he argues, taints one with a real-life vision and he irretrievably loses the more perfect inner vision that he had not realized he previously had.

In *Table Talk* Hazlitt explains that when he was a boy he longed after far away hills, but when he finally went to them, he found them just lumpish heaps of earth. He says, "I learnt from this (in part) to leave 'Yarrow unvisited,' and not idly to disturb a dream of good!" (*Hz* 6: 229). What the mind imagines is often more perfect than the reality, as Wordsworth discovered on the Simplon Pass (*Prelude* 6: 488-548). The same philosophy applies to poetry as well. "The province of the imagination," Hazlitt says in his lecture "Introductory – On Poetry in General," "is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions" (*Hz* 2: 172). If what has been a creation only of the imagination is given a form, it gains a defined reality, but loses the original imagined vision. He says, "There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time, the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical" (*Hz* 2: 172). Eaton Stannard Barrett and William Gifford complained in the *Quarterly Review* that, "As to the assertion that there can never be another Jacob's dream, we see no reason why dreams should be scientific; particularly as Mr Hazlitt's work is a convincing proof, that even the waking thoughts of some men are safe from the encroachments of reason and philosophy" (*Hz* 2: 369-70). Hazlitt's critics have mistaken him partly because what he was exploring was, as he says, "undefined," and partly because he was doubling back on what eighteenth-century philosophers had firmly planted in the minds of men. Where the Empiricists had said no thought or image can exist that has not at some point been experienced through the senses, Hazlitt says, "we can only fancy what we do not know" (*Hz* 2: 172). The idea is

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[33] Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1: 16.

different: Hazlitt is not saying that the visions in our minds have come from elsewhere. What he, Lamb and others are saying is that there is something else, something imagined, not necessarily a defined image, but nonetheless there is something that can be lost by knowledge, experience and objective imagery.

Madness was often paralleled with both dreams and poetry in the Romantic era. In Hazlitt's "On Dreams" he says,

> So in madness, there is, I should apprehend, the same tyranny of the imagination over the judgment; that is, the mind has slipped its cable, and single images meet, and jostle, and unite suddenly together, without any power to arrange or compare them with others, with which they are connected in the world of reality. There is a continual phantasmagoria: whatever shapes and colours come together are by the heat and violence of the brain referred to external nature, without regard to the order of time, place, or circumstance" (*Hz* 8: 18).

Hazlitt's description of madness very closely resembles many contemporary descriptions of dreams. It is "the same tyranny of the imagination over the judgement" (*Hz* 8: 18). Dreams do resemble poetry in many ways, but dreams are intriguingly paradoxical. They can be seen either as the creative workings of the pure imagination, or as associated nonsense. A mad poet may be thought to have a closer connection to the imagination, but he may also be seen as simply mad. Highly imaginative fiction may seem to be the purest form, but the poets insisted there must be an art to it as well: great poetry cannot be nonsense or madness. The imagination is the dominant faculty in Hazlitt's description of madness (and of dreams), but it is said to be *tyrannizing* judgement. Poetry may seem to be a dream, but the poets

would have it qualified. As Keats wittily remarks, a poet "must temper the Imagination as the Critics say with Judgment" (*KL* 2: 97).

In "The Sanity of True Genius," Lamb argues that poetry cannot be aligned with madness and that,

> The ground of the mistake is, that men, finding in the raptures of the higher poetry a condition of exaltation, to which they have no parallel in their own experience, besides the spurious resemblance of it in dreams and fevers, impute a state of dreaminess and fever to the poet. But the true poet dreams being awake. He is not possessed by his subject, but has dominion over it (*LW* 2: 187).

A poem may have a dream-like fictional reality, it may create a dream within the mind, it may, as Lamb says, have a "condition of exaltation" (*LW* 2: 187) similar to that of dreams, but the metaphor must end there or be changed; the poet is not a dreamer. Yet so much of poetry and dreams could be associated, and in a sense what a poet does when creating a poem, just as what a reader does when reading a poem, could be called dreaming. Lamb does not deny that poetry is a dream; he qualifies it: "the true poet dreams being awake" (*LW* 2: 187).

For the Romantic writers who saw romance as a dream, Spenser was the ultimate poet of dreams. *The Faerie Queene* epitomized all that was dream-like about romance. As Lamb's essay continues it is Spenser he uses to demonstrate the poet who "dreams being awake" (*LW* 2: 187):

> [...] – that we should be at one moment in the cave of an old hoarder of treasures, at the next at the forge of the Cyclops, in a palace and yet in hell, all at once, with the shifting mutations of the most rambling dream, and our judgment yet all the time awake, and neither able nor

> willing to detect the fallacy, – is a proof of that hidden sanity which still guides the poet in his widest seeming-aberrations (*LW* 2: 189).

Lamb is drawing parallels from Spenser's romance to dreams and is enforcing the associations. The scene in *The Faerie Queene* is one place and yet another just as the stone and the shell in Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab" are also known to be books (*Prelude* 5: 113). It is the "shifting mutations of the most rambling dream" (*LW* 2: 187). The narrative of his poem unfolds with the windings and the depths characteristic of romance, but also of dreams. The poem is a dream, but the dreamer is "yet all the time awake" (*LW* 2: 189). At any time his judgement could refuse to believe the fantastic tale. That he does not is, for Lamb, proof that the poet is not a dreamer, but an artist.

It is not only the poet that draws the divide from poetry being a dream. A dream is often nonsense to the waking mind whereas a great poem, even the most fanciful romance, never can be. In "On Dreams" Hazlitt was certainly not the first to notice that,

> It is unlucky that we sometimes remember the heroic sentiments, the profound discoveries, the witty repartees we have uttered in our sleep. The one turn to bombast, the others are mere truisms, and the last absolute nonsense. Yet we clothe them certainly with a fancied importance at the moment (*Hz* 8: 19).

Dreams may appear to be dramatic, profound or even prophetic when one is dreaming, and at times when he is on the verge of waking. However, as Lamb agrees, when judgement is on call as it is when reading poetry, a dream cannot stand the test that poetry can.

> Let the most romantic of us, that has been entertained all night with the spectacle of some wild and magnificent vision, recombine it in the morning, and try it by his waking judgment. That which appeared so shifting, and yet so coherent, while that faculty was passive, when it comes under cool examination, shall appear so reasonless and so unlinked, that we are ashamed to have been so deluded; and to have taken, though but in sleep, a monster for a god. But the transitions in [Spenser's episode of the cave of Mammon] are every whit as violent as in the most extravagant dream, and yet the waking judgment ratifies them (*LW* 2: 189).

The poem seems like a dream, but that is precisely the poet's art. Lamb might have disagreed with Coleridge: is dreaming really the "highest degree" (*CLL* 2: 266) of illusion when it is a poem that can elude waking judgement, not a dream? Yet Lamb and Coleridge both agreed on the qualifying of poetry as a dream. Lamb says, "It is not enough to say that the whole episode is a copy of the mind's conceptions in sleep; it is, in some sort – but what a copy!" (*LW* 2: 189). The artist may be inspired by and may emulate dreams, but what he produces is not a dream but a poem. It stands up to waking judgement. Coleridge likewise says, "A poem may in one sense be a dream, but it must be a waking dream" (*CLL* 2: 425). The metaphor is qualified: poetry is a *waking* dream.

Poetry was often defined as a waking dream in the Romantic era. R. A. Foakes says that "the image of the 'waking dream' is echoed by Darwin, Herder, Schlegel, and Coleridge."[34] If one considers not just the leading theorists, but essayists and poets as well, the list could be greatly expanded. Although the

discussions are of poetry in general, it is very often the works of Spenser and Shakespeare to which the poets and essayists specifically refer. With Spenser many elements of his writing, particularly with *The Faerie Queene*, were aligned with dreams. Lamb, as discussed, speaks of the "shifting mutations" of the characters and scenes in Spenser's romance (*LW* 2: 189). Hazlitt aligns Spenser's fancy and the sentiment in his poetry with a dream when he writes, "Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!" (*Hz* 2: 203) It is Spenser's description of Morpheus's house that Hunt refers to as a "solemn, *remote*, fantastic, dreamy picture" (*Ht* 426).

Hazlitt and Hunt both describe Spenser's poetic language in the terms of a dream. When Hazlitt says, "It is as if 'the honey-heavy dew of slumber' had settled on his pen [...]" (*Hz* 2: 197), he describes the dream-like atmosphere created by the words and by the poetry not necessarily linked through context. Hunt likewise says, "It is that of a fine, lazy, luxurious, far-off, majestic dream; and therefore may take all the licence of a dream, compatible with beauty and dignity" (*Ht* 447). Yet here Hunt links the language with the greater whole. Spenser's language is that of a dream, which creates the dream of poetry and takes the reader into the dreamspace where he will accept all of the terms of the dream as Spenser chooses to display them. Spenser's language is what Hunt initially names, but many other aspects and indeed the poetry as a whole, he recognizes, are also a dream. Hazlitt likewise says,

> Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea: but the effect is still the

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[34] R. A. Foakes, editor's introduction, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Foakes, vol. 1, Bollingen Ser. 75 (London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987) lvii.

> same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish ever to be recalled (*Hz* 2: 205).

The words and the music of his own Spenserian stanzas create a music that lulls the senses away from reality and into the dreamspace. Again the language and "music" (*Hz* 2: 205) are the focus, but the word "and" (*Hz* 2: 205) that immediately follows the primary statement suggests that he is adding the dream of Spenser's language to what is already accepted. In all respects, Hazlitt is saying, "Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams" (*Hz* 2: 205).

Like Spenser, Shakespeare features centrally in Romantic-era discussions concerning dreams. While this is more so because of his own thoughts on poetry and dreams, there are times when it is his poetry that is referred to in such context. In *The Round Table* Hazlitt says of Shakespeare,

> He seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own, but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass sucessively through 'every variety of untried being,' – to be now *Hamlet*, now *Othello*, now *Lear*, now *Falstaff*, now *Ariel*. In the mingled interests and feelings belonging to this wide range of imaginary reality, in the tumult and rapid transitions of this waking dream, the author could not easily find time to think of himself [...] (*Hz* 2: 26).

Here Hazlitt refers not only to a poem as a dream but to the "imaginary reality" (*Hz* 2: 26) that spans Shakespeare's range of works. As Shakespeare spent so much time creating other individuals with other complex personalities and emotions, Hazlitt says that Shakespeare cannot have spent much time involved in his own character. He seemed, to Hazlitt, to live within the "imaginary realit[ies]" (*Hz* 2: 26) of his characters – within the "waking dream" (*Hz* 2: 26). The waking dream here is not

only a poem or play with all its transitions, it is the imaginative world generally, and the world that fiction creates.

In a notebook entry of Coleridge's the imaginary reality is also called a dream, though it is not in the terms of Shakespeare himself so often living within it, but of the imaginative space he creates for the reader. Based on Gillman's ideas, Coleridge notes that whereas in *Hamlet* the reader sympathizes wholly with the title character, in the other plays the reader is viewer of and sympathizes with all.

> – Of no part can you say, as in Hamlet, *they* are moving – but ever is it *we*, or that period & portion of human action which is *unified* into a Dream, even as in a Dream the personal unity is diffused & severalized (divided to the sight tho' united in the dim feeling) into a sort of Reality (*CNB* 4: 4714).

The "period & portion of human action," the imaginative reality created by the fiction, comes together as a dream in which we take part. Unlike a real dream in which the sole dreamer seems to split into different and unconnected personas and never knows what the thoughts or actions of the other dream characters may be, in Shakespeare's plays, Coleridge argues, the sympathy is unified. The characters act individually, but the whole is completely understood by the reader who takes part and is wholly involved in the dream. In a sense, then, the dream acts more like reality, whereas the imaginary reality of the play is called by Coleridge a dream.

In early 1818 Hazlitt would have disagreed with Coleridge and Gillman. In his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton," he too says that in real dreams the dreamer cannot anticipate the actions of the other characters; however, he sees this as the same in Shakespeare:

> As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakespeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind (*Hz* 2: 211).

Whereas Coleridge calls both a dream, yet defines them differently, Hazlitt aligns the two as similar experiences. That the "gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind" (*Hz* 2: 211) suggests that the reader does not move either with Hamlet or with the dream as Coleridge would have it, but stands motionless while the play moves around and through him. A Shakespearean drama has a life of its own, according to Hazlitt, in the same way as do dreams.

The aligning of poetry and fiction, particularly with *The Arabian Nights*, Spenser and Shakespeare occurred throughout the Romantic era. Those who qualified poetry as a *waking* dream were writing in response to the broader metaphor of poetry as a dream, yet the qualified metaphor does not only occur in later years and the broader metaphor does not only appear in the earlier years as one might expect. As early as 1804, roughly fifteen years earlier than the above-quoted statements on sympathy with the dream of Shakespeare's plays, Coleridge qualified the dream of poetry saying,

> Poetry a rationalized dream dealing [?about] to manifold Forms our own Feelings, that never perhaps were attached by us consciously to our own personal Selves. – What is the Lear, the Othello, but a divine Dream / all Shakespere, & nothing Shakespere. – O there are Truths

> below the Surface in the subject of Sympathy, & how we *become* that which we understandly behold & hear, having, how much God perhaps only knows, created part even of the Form (*CNB* 2: 2086).

It is not any one poem or the act of reading or writing one, but poetry itself in all of its many aspects that is a waking, or "rationalized dream" (*CNB* 2: 2086). It acts as a dream in exploring all of the various different sides of human feelings. As Hazlitt says that Shakespeare passed "sucessively through 'every variety of untried being'" (*Hz* 2: 26), Coleridge says that so too does a reader of poetry. In poetry a reader experiences those emotions common to mankind whether he knows it or not. Poetry is a dream in the widest sense possible; it not only creates a dream in the reader's mind, but it is itself a universal dream. Coleridge argues that Shakespeare unearths the unfamiliar passions inherent in mankind. Shakespeare's great dramas embody all of the many sides of his own feelings, yet they are not particularly his own. They appeal to readers universally and enforce upon them the realization of the emotions that lay dormant within them. Coleridge feels that there is something that unconsciously connects mankind, something that allows us to step into others and sympathize so wholly that we not only "*become*" (*CNB* 2: 2086), but contribute to the creation of their complexity of emotions as well. While "the Lear, the Othello" (*CNB* 2: 2086) unearth what is unconscious thereby adding to and reshaping what is conscious, the reader, through what is unearthed, adds to and reshapes what Shakespeare had put into the works. The "divine Dream" (*CNB* 2: 2086) is not the dream of a poem, but that of our nature. In a lecture of 1811-12 on Shakespeare and Milton, Coleridge is recorded by J. Tomalin to have said that great works of literature that delight, such as *The Arabian Nights* and Shakespeare's dramas, are superior to moral books because,

> The shifting of the scenes could add nothing to the delusion and only destroy [it] by arousing from that delightful dream of our inner nature which was in truth more than a dream. It was a vision of what we might be hereafter – which was the endeavour of the moral being to exert, and at the same time to express itself in the infinite (*CLL* 1: 278-9).[35]

The "delightful dream" (*CLL* 1: 278) of poetry or fiction is our "inner nature" (*CLL* 1: 278). As Coleridge says of all great writers, he believes that Shakespeare exerts his inner nature and expresses it "in the infinite" (*CLL* 1: 279): his *King Lear* and *Othello* are "all Shakespeare, & nothing Shakespeare" (*CNB* 2: 2086). The "divine" (*CNB* 2: 2086) and "delightful" (*CLL* 1: 278) "rationalized dream" (*CNB* 2: 2086) of poetry is, to Coleridge, the "inner nature" (*CLL* 1: 278) of mankind.

Dream in Romantic writing is given at times significant, even divine, status. The writers make for the word dream the high claims that they make for the imagination and for poetry. However, the contradictory nature of the word does sometimes bring dream down to a lower status. In the lecture on Shakespeare and Milton, Coleridge says that the "delightful dream of our inner nature" (*CLL* 1: 278) that is evoked by great works "was in truth more than a dream. It was a vision of what we might be hereafter" (*CLL* 1: 279). Vision here is clearly given a higher status – it is "more than a dream" (*CLL* 1: 279). Despite Coleridge's vast amount of writings on the significance of dreams and dreaming, and his usually high claims for the dream of poetry, at times in his works dreams are given a very low status. In an important notebook entry on imagination, he distinguishes it from fancy, which, he says,

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[35] This quotation is taken from the transcription by James Dykes Campbell of the notes by J. Tomalin

> [...] is but the aoristus primus (or Indefinitum ad *omne* tempus) of Memory, in the service of *Choice*: & which in the absence of Choice or conscious Volition becoming the slave of Association, while present bodily *Sensation*, abdominal or pectoral, is the Usurper or Vice-gerent of *Choice*, loses the name of Fancy, & is called *Delirium* or *Dreaming* [...] (*CNB* 4: 4692).

If poetry were connected to dreams in this passage, it would only be through their mutual use of memory. The fancy does not hold the high status that the imagination holds, and dreaming, aligned only with delirium, acts as the fancy in the absence of choice. Dreams and madness are again paralleled, but they are both viewed in their less positive aspects.

Hazlitt, too, often uses the word dream aligned with poetry in a negative sense. To him, poor poetry can be a feverish dream or nightmare. Of Byron's fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Hazlitt complains,

> We have read it carefully through, but it has left only the same impression on our minds that a troubled dream does, – as disturbed, as confused, as disjointed, as harassing, and as unprofitable. It is an indigestion of the mind. It is the lassitude or feverish tossing and tumbling of the imagination, after having taken a surfeit of pleasure, and fed upon the fumes of pride (*Hz* 9: 31).

Hazlitt describes dreams and Byron's poetry with the same "shifting mutations" (*LW* 2: 189) that Lamb had used to describe dreams and Spenser's poetry, but with a shifting so violent and unnatural as to become a nightmare. It is a brilliant twisting of the word on the part of Hazlitt. In another critique of Byron, Hazlitt charges him with

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and should not be considered to be Coleridge's exact words.

being only novelty and calls his "beauties," "the changing visions of a feverish dream" (*Hz* 9: 175). Hazlitt is always particularly good at twisting his own words. He may start an essay with praise and almost before the reader realizes, he has turned the words into a critique.[36] The metaphor of poetry as a dream was especially effective because of the elusive and antithetical nature of dreams. In an essay on Coleridge's 1816 publication, Hazlitt critiques *Christabel* using to his advantage the associations of dreams:

> In parts of *Christabel* there is a great deal of beauty, both of thought, imagery, and versification; but the effect of the general story is dim, obscure, and visionary. It is more like a dream than a reality. The mind, in reading it, is spell-bound. The sorceress seems to act without power – *Christabel* to yield without resistance. The faculties are thrown into a state of metaphysical suspense and theoretical imbecility (*Hz* 9: 24).

Knowing that great poetry was often compared to a dream and that both Hazlitt and Coleridge often spoke highly of dreams and of the dream of poetry, there is little in the passage that is pointedly negative. Hazlitt uses vocabulary that could not be taken as positive, such as "dim" and "theoretical imbecility" (*Hz* 9: 24), and he contrasts the dreaminess with the beauty in the poem with the use of the word "but" (*Hz* 9: 24). However, that a poem should be "visionary," or that it should capture the minds of the reader with "suspense" and spellbind them would at other times appear to be the aim of certain poetry. Hazlitt says it is "more like a dream than a reality" (*Hz* 9: 24), which could be positive if, as Coleridge says, poetry should evoke the "dream of our inner nature" (*CLL* 1: 278), negative if, as Lamb says, a poor writer "turns life into a

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[36] See Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998).

dream" while a great wit "to the wildest dreams gives the sobrieties of every day occurences" (*LW* 2: 189), or simply confusing when one considers the contemporary saying that life itself (and therefore reality) is a dream. However Hazlitt is criticizing Coleridge, and he says of *Christabel*,

> In the midst of moon-light, and fluttering ringlets, and flitting clouds, and enchanted echoes, and airy abstractions of all sorts, there is one genuine burst of humanity, worthy of the author, when no dream oppresses him, no spell binds him (*Hz* 9: 25).

Coleridge at times aligns the dream of poetry with humanity; here Hazlitt opposes the two. The "airy abstractions" (*Hz* 9: 25) that Hazlitt elsewhere calls the perspective of the picture and the dream of poetry that is lost in an acted play, here make up the dream that oppresses Coleridge and makes him "obscure" (*Hz* 9: 24).

The paradoxical nature of dreams is part of the attraction for Romantic writers. Dreams are themselves elusive, and so too are the implications associated with them. Romantic poets could push boundaries and alter definitions with dreams in ways that were not as easily done with words like visionary. Dreams provided intriguingly provocative metaphors, such as the dream of romance and the dream of poetry. They could suggest the profound, the prophetic, and the visionary, but a poet was not confined to a stance as they could also imply delirium, nonsense, and nightmares. In her dissertation, Bobbie Jo Allen is seeking the answer to why the Romantics wrote dream poetry; I believe it lies not only in response to dream theory, but in the rise in the popularity of Medieval dream poetry and romance, in the idea that poetry is a waking dream, and in the provocative but contradicting associations that allowed the poets to explore without being confined because, as Lamb says, "There is no law to judge of the lawless, or canon by which a dream may be criticised" (*LW* 2: 65).

Chapter Two

The Nature and Significance of Dreams

Dreams in the Romantic era could be seen in a variety of ways. They could be thought to give glimpses of death and a world beyond the one in the conscious waking world, but that world could also be inward, within the imagination. They might be seen as subconscious understanding or inner truth, or in some way a communication with the eternal. Dreams could be viewed as a type of purgatory or spiritual guiding force, though they might also be seen as merely memories, random association and what Freud would later term day-residue. Dreams were paradoxical and mysterious. They challenged the concept of self and left gaps in philosophical theories. Yet more importantly for Romantic poets, dreams could be seen as a theatre of the mind, as presenting nightly spectacles much like fiction. They were at times said to be more emotionally affecting than poetry itself. Dreams could be seen as the creations of the mind, the dramas of a powerful imagination, independent of self will. Dream poetry builds upon these possibilities of dreams to poise itself as highly imaginative, at times even visionary poetry.

All of the writers discussed in this chapter held different opinions about the nature of dreams at different times. Grevel Lindop describes the situation well when he says:

> In early nineteenth-century Britain, there was no generally agreed theory of the causes and nature of the dreams that occur in sleep. [...] In reality, of course, no one stuck rigidly to [any] theory, just as no one sticks rigidly to any one theory of dreams at the present day. [...] we all tend to believe that some of our dreams are caused by the state of

our body, some by external accidents like noises and temperature, some by the events of the day, some by emotions such as anxiety, anger or love, and that a few are in some way prophetic. Almost everyone privately believes that they have had some dreams which predicted the future correctly in small or large ways. Exactly the same mixed spectrum of beliefs was current in most people's minds two hundred years ago.[1]

In the Romantic era a variety of ideas on the nature and significance of dreams were held, often simultaneously, and many of the ideas are not so different from those commonly believed today. With the arguable exception of Coleridge, Romantic writers were more interested in using the ambiguities that dreaming provided for poetic effect, than they were in discovering any one theory of dreams. Coleridge certainly strove to understand dreaming, a fact that is reflected in his notebooks and demonstrated by the emphasis of this chapter on his writing on dreams, but even he uses the ambiguities surrounding dreams in his poetry more than his dream theories. The ideas on the nature and significance of dreams in Romantic writing demonstrate rather a spectrum of possibilities that dreaming suggested.

Byron was attentive to the ideas of the Romantic public even as he was at the center of creating them. His introductory stanza in "The Dream" provides a summary of many popular Romantic notions of dreams, using it to validate his own dream-framed poem as visionary. In the build-up to his recalling "a *vision* which I dream'd" ("The Dream" 23; my emphasis), he strengthens its power of insight by arguing that sleep and dreams are profound. Following the arguments Byron makes and the ideas he suggests in "The Dream," the ensuing pages are not intent primarily on giving a

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[1] Lindop, "Romantic Poetry and the Idea of Dream," 20-21.

reading of Byron's poem, but rather on using the poem as a point of departure for an outline of the major ideas of the Romantic era and of the Romantic writers in particular on the nature and significance of dreams.

Sleep has been aligned with death in literature throughout the ages. It provides a peaceful and familiar image for the harsh reality of death. Yet some Romantic writers entertained the notion that sleep actually is a form of death and death nothing but sleep. In "The Dream," Byron begins his poem by arguing that sleep is another plane of existence, a world of its own, with reasons for being beyond those we take for granted:

> Our life is twofold; Sleep hath its own world,
>
> A boundary between the things misnamed
>
> Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,
>
> And a wide realm of wild reality (1-4).

Death and existence are misnamed because death is not a ceasing to exist, nor is it only that state after life. The division is much like that between sleeping and waking. Death, Byron implies, is similar to, yet an extension of, the world of sleep.

In 1808 Coleridge also saw the two states as more than simply a metaphor. Just as sleep renews the spirit after the previous day's hardships, so, he felt, "longer deeper Sleep is required for the Heart's Oblivion & thence Renewal – even the long total Sleep of Death –" (*CNB* 3: 3309). In 1811 he expanded the role of sleep as renewal when he tried to justify his nightmares as education and preparation of the soul in sleep in the same way that the state between death and the afterlife must, he felt, prepare one for resurrection:

> Who shall say that the Interval between Death and the Resurrection may not be as necessary for the growth of the Spirit, and to render it

> capable of the great Transition, as Sleep – or the deeper Entrancement of the Chrysalis – May not such processes be then carried on, which would be incompatible with consciousness – intolerable Torment perhaps? (*CNB* 3: 4054).

The "Interval between Death and the Resurrection" (*CNB* 3: 4054) may be, Coleridge postulated, a time of transitional growth necessary to educate the soul. By comparing it with "Sleep" (*CNB* 3: 4054), Coleridge is suggesting that sleep, also, is a period of growth. The metaphor of the "Chrysalis" (*CNB* 3: 4054) suggests a dormant state of renewal before resurrection as a butterfly – the classical image of Psyche, the soul – yet the quiescence is only of the body. Inside the cocoon the soul is actively growing and changing. Entranced by nightly visions, the soul in sleep is educated by experiences in dreams, some of which would not be possible, others unbearable, in waking life. Dreaming, Coleridge suggests, is a kind of purgatory or a transition necessary for the development and perfecting of the psyche.

Coleridge's theories differ from several of the other Romantic writers in that, whether a renewal or torment, sleep and death are transitory states. There will always be an awakening. At times Hazlitt would agree that death is sleep, but for him the sleep of death must be the final state of existence. In *Table Talk*, after quoting Shakespeare, "And our little life is rounded with a sleep" (*Hz* 6: 288)[2], he argues that we fear or regret death in vain. We do not look back to a time before our birth with lament for not being alive –

> [...] we had lain *perdus* all this while, snug, out of harm's way; and had slept out our thousands of centuries without wanting to be waked

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[2] Quoted from William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, 6th ed., Arden (1958; London: Methuen, 1984) 4.1: 157-58.

> up; at peace and free from care, in a nonage, in a sleep deeper and calmer than that of infancy [...] (*Hz* 6: 288).

In death we will only "sink to final repose again, and forget the troubled dream of life" (*Hz* 6: 288-9). Death, Hazlitt maintains, will be a carefree, peaceful state of sleep.

When Byron was writing "The Dream" in the summer of 1816 he was at Geneva with the Shelleys, and Shelley himself as well as his early poems *Queen Mab* and *Alastor* were influential.[3] In *Alastor*, published only five months earlier in February of the same year, Shelley had written,

> Lost, lost, forever lost,
>
> In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep,
>
> That beautiful shape! Does the dark gate of death
>
> Conduct to thy mysterious paradise,
>
> O Sleep? (209-13).

The image of the veiled maid that the Poet saw in a dream is lost within his imagination, within "the wide pathless desert of dim sleep" (210). Similar to Byron's "wide realm of wild reality" ("The Dream" 4), Shelley's image is more sceptical. Byron is asserting that the realm is a reality. With echoes of Keats's statement, "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth" (*KL* 1: 184), Byron here suggests that the imagination has an inner truth – its own reality. Byron asserts that sleep is "A boundary between the things misnamed / Death and existence" ("The Dream" 2-3), that sleep is a form of death and death of sleep. Shelley's Poet, by contrast, only asks. In desperation the Poet hopes death is sleep, that death will take him deep inside the realm of sleep, but "doubt with sudden tide flowed on his heart"

and "The insatiate hope which it awakened, stung / His brain even like despair" (220-22). While Shelley may call the realm of sleep a "mysterious paradise" (212), death will not lead the Poet there, and his folly is in believing that it is the true reality.

In "Mont Blanc," similarly, Shelley wonders if death may be a form of sleep with more "shapes," more activity, than the thought of the living:

> Some say that gleams of a remoter world
> Visit the soul in sleep – that death is slumber
> And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
> Of those who wake and live ("Mont Blanc" 50-53).

Sleep may be a vehicle for hints of a remoter world. Equally death may be sleep, a realization of that remoter world glimpsed in the living state of sleep. Indeed, death may be an alternative existence, not disengaged from thought, but rather one busied with "shapes" like thoughts (52). Though it is here only "some" who say, and not specifically Shelley, he entertained similar ideas in several of his poems.[4] In "A Summer-Evening Churchyard" Shelley says,

> The dead are sleeping in their sepulchres:
> And, mouldering as they sleep, a thrilling sound
> Half sense, half thought, among the darkness stirs.[5]

The poem suggests that the dead may be in a state of "Half sense, half thought,"[6] though ambiguity in the following lines ensure that it is only a suggestion, only one of many possibilities.

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[3] Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 26-31.

[4] See for example "A Summer Evening Churchyard," 19-30; "The Daemon of the World," 31-32; *Alastor* see also 57 and 699-701; *Laon and Cythna* 4: 1684; "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills," 138; "Silence; Oh Well are Death and Sleep and Thou," 1-4; "Julian and Maddalo," 498-9; "Life Rounded with Sleep," 1-3; *Adonais,* 19-27, 58-63, 336, 343-4, and 361.

[5] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Summer-Evening Churchyard, Lechlade, Gloucestershire," *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, vol. 1 of 2 (London: Longman, 1989) 19-21.

[6] Shelley, "A Summer-Evening Churchyard," 21.

When the state of sleep is invoked in Romantic poetry, it is often intended to signify more than simply a shutting down of the body and reason, more than just the nonsense of random associations. It may be a retreat into the imagination, another plane of existence, perhaps intellectual or all knowing, perhaps, as in Keats's swooning and sleeping Endymion, sensual and emotional. Coleridge realized that he uttered nonsense in his sleep when he dreamt the words "Varrius thus prophecied Vinegar at his Door by damned frigid Tremblings" (*CNB* 2: 2542), but this did not deter him from his lifelong intrigue of sleep and dreams. Rather the tension between the nonsense and the seemingly significant universality led him to analyze the "Language of Dreams" in May 1818 (*CNB* 3: 4409). In Romantic poetry, sleep is neither an escape nor a shutting down; it is often the entering of the imaginative or emotional, the creative and inspired mind. In only the first four lines of "The Dream," Byron has already established an agreement between Romantic writer and Romantic-era reader that sleep is an imaginative existence. From this, one could infer that a vision proceeding from within that state – the tale Byron will tell in stanzas 2-8 – may have the profound truth of life's mysteries.

Moving from sleep to dreams, Byron argues that dreams have life in themselves and present to the dreamer the same emotions, both good and bad, as does waking life: "And dreams in their developement have breath, / And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy" ("The Dream" 5-6). Creations of the organic imagination, dreams grow independently of the conscious self. When a poet writes he is actively creating – choosing the words to use, choosing what action will happen next, in short, using judgement and reason. Dreams seem to create themselves, or rather the imagination from its own resources acts independently from the will to organically create the dramatic displays visualized in dreams. Dreams are not, Byron asserts,

random images released when the will is at rest; they have their own will, their own growth, their own life – and their own emotions.[7]

Part of the reason many Romantic poets found dreams so intriguing is that they contain the elements of poetry.[8] They create, they develop into curious and often spectacular dramas, a "dream-theatre,"[9] and they make the viewer, the dreamer, feel emotions of an intensity that a poet must envy. That the drama is often nonsense to our waking reason is irrelevant; within the dream the strange occurrences are rarely, if ever, questioned. Yet the dreamer can feel powerful emotions, more powerful, sometimes, than are felt or that can be expressed in our waking lives. In a letter from 1819 Keats wrote of a Dante-inspired dream he had. The emotions he felt in the dream-state were intense, and he was disappointed at not being able to transfer them to a sonnet it had inspired him to write. What he is able to transfer to the letter shows an atmospheric dream overpowered with sensations and emotions:

> The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life – I floated about the whirling atmosphere as it is described [in the fifth canto of *The Inferno*] with a beautiful figure to whose lips mine were joined at it seem'd for an age – and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm – even flowery tree tops sprung up and we rested on them sometimes with the lightness of a cloud till the wind blew us away again – (*KL* 2: 91).

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[7] Because Coleridge is the same man who developed ideas of the imagination as an organic faculty, it may be interesting to note that to Coleridge, Byron's use of the word "breath" may have seemed ironic. Later in life Coleridge was concerned with the lack of breath in dreams, as evidenced in entry *CNB* 4: 4689, when after a nightmare in which he dreamt that he died, he became intensely concerned about "Life *without breathing*," and in *CNB* 4: 5360 when he points out that we do not notice if the characters in our dreams breathe.

[8] This idea that the poets were interested in dreams for the relationship to poetry is more thoroughly discussed in chapter one.

[9] Thomas De Quincey, *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, vol 13. (London: Black, 1897) 340.

Although he is in Hell, presumably with Francesca, the place he describes is spring-like – though the Hell around him is cold and dark, he is warm, feels delight and possibly love. Rather than the storms of Hell, his "whirling atmosphere" (*KL* 2: 91) is a spring breeze blowing the kissing couple from tree to tree. While there is some action in the dream, namely the moving in the wind, the emphasis is on the way Keats felt in the dream. He says, "I tried a Sonnet upon it – there are fourteen lines but nothing of what I felt in it – o that I could dream it every night – " (*KL* 2: 91). Even Keats, a masterful poet of sensations and emotions, felt that the emotions of dreams could be far greater than those of poetry or of our waking experiences.

Coleridge, too, was concerned with how emotionally charged dreams could be; however, in this case it was his horrifying nightmares that continually confirmed to him their power. In 1796, he began recording his observations on the nature and significance of dreams, and by the early 1800s was recording some of his dreams and nightmares as well. By October 1803, Coleridge was suffering immensely in his sleep. Many of the descriptions of his nightmares show the intense emotional pain and fear he suffered, but a note of a different kind perhaps better demonstrates the great effect that these dream emotions had on Coleridge's state of mind:

> I slept again with dreams of sorrow & pain, tho' not of downright Fright & prostration / I was worsted but not conquered – in sorrows and in sadness & in sore & angry Struggles – but not trampled down / but this will all come again, if I do not take care (*CNB* 1: 1577).

The less horrifying emotions of sorrow, pain and anger, in themselves harrowing, are almost a blessing to one so enfeebled, so "conquered" (*CNB* 1: 1577) by terror in his nightmares. Nightmares, Coleridge admits to himself in his private notebook entry,

have the power to control and trample down his spirit completely. The emotions of these dreams are entirely overpowering.

Although late 1803 saw the climax of Coleridge's worst nightmares, they did not entirely subside and in fact continued off and on for most of his life. Coleridge continued recording many of his dreams, nightmares, and his thoughts and observations of them. In many of these, some noticed, some unnoticed, emotion plays a great role. In some lines of verse, Coleridge asserts that in his dream he feels even "*more* anguish"("Lines Written in a Dream" 1.2: 1; my emphasis) than if the same occurrence had really happened:

> I know tis but a Dream, yet feel more anguish
>
> Than if 'twere Truth. It has been often so,
>
> Must I die under it? Is no one near?
>
> Will no one hear these stifled groans, & wake me? ("Lines Written in a Dream" 1.2: 1-4).[10]

Dream emotions are, he writes, more powerful than the emotions of our waking lives. Nightmares and distempered dreams[11] were, to Coleridge, a danger and an imminent threat to his life. His father had supposedly had strange and remarkable dreams just prior to his death (*CM* 1: 163; *CL* 1: 209-10). As late as 1826 Coleridge still felt extreme anxiety from what he felt to be a true threat. After suffering "one of [his] most grievous and alarming <Scream-> Dreams," he writes, "It is strongly impressed on my mind, that I shall imitate my dear Father in this as faithfully as Nature imitates

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[10] The date of the entry is uncertain. J. C. C. Mays in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols., Bollingen Ser. 75 (London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001) vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, 16 vols (1969-2001) cited here, and Kathleen Coburn, editor of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (London: Routledge; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957-2002) in which the verse appears at *CNB* 2: 2799, give the tentative dates of February to March 1806.

[11] Coleridge often used the term "distempered dream." It seems to differ from "nightmair" in being a bad dream, but still a sleeping dream, whereas a "nightmair" Coleridge believed occurred in a state

& or repeats him in me in so many other points – viz. that I shall die in sleep" (*CNB* 4: 5360). The emotion, the terror, the "anguish" ("Lines Written in a Dream" 1.2: 1) felt in his dreams was far more overwhelming to Coleridge than ever could be experienced by the light of day.

Coleridge's most well known expression of the emotions he felt in his dreams is "The Pains of Sleep," written in 1803 during the climax of his worst nightmares, and first published in 1816. Although the narrator of the poem feels only love and reverential trust before giving himself up to sleep, in the dream world he is tormented. He is tortured physically by the "shapes and thoughts" (1.2: 17), but much more so by the barrage of intense emotions that take him from one extreme to another – from self-pity, to scorn, to "revenge," "Desire," "loathing," hate, passion, and confusion, to "guilt, remorse or woe" and "Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame" (1.2: 18-32).[12] The narrator is overwhelmed by the torturous emotions, trampled down, and utterly exhausted. His waking spirit is crushed by his dream.

Dreams can only be analyzed, interpreted, recorded or discussed from the waking state and therefore must be tainted by waking reason that inevitably sorts through the images trying to make some sense of it, trying to order the images into a sequence of events from the memory as one tries to recall it.[13] Likewise the emotions felt upon waking are different from those felt in the dream, but are nevertheless an important part of the dreaming experience. In "The Pains of Sleep" Coleridge recognized the role of affecting post-dream emotions and included in his experience the waking turmoil of the desperation of needing to pray aloud, the "anguish" and

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between sleeping and waking. See *CNB* 1: 205 for one example of Coleridge's use of the term "distempered dream."

[12] The quotations are taken from the 1816 version. Certain differences in the 1803 version will be discussed later in this chapter.

[13] I am indebted to Spearing for bringing to my attention the fact that our only personal knowledge of our dreaming state is from our waking memory of it. See Spearing, introduction, *Reading Dreams*, 1-2.

"agony" (1.2: 14-15), the sadness, the shock, the weeping, the grief, and again, the self-pity (1.2: 33-52). When a dreamer awakes, post-dream emotions leave him affected: if the dream was enjoyable the dreamer may bring a feeling of lightness and joy with him to the coming day; if the dream was disturbing it may, as Byron recognized, "leave a weight upon our waking thoughts" ("The Dream" 7).

Post-dream emotions are rife in Coleridge's notebook entries, especially those of October to December 1803. Such passages painfully reveal his loneliness and sense of isolation from the ones he loved. The suffering he endured from the effects of opium withdrawal is evident in the many descriptions of the night sky and stormy or cloudy weather that appear scattered through the entries of this time. Some of these may show the emotions of sleepless nights or those of disturbed sleep when he has not mentioned this in the entry, though we cannot be certain of this. Those entries that do tell of distempered dreams and nightmares show the acute feelings of melancholy, sadness and pain that could follow.[14] After the dream that left him "worsted but not conquered – in sorrows and in sadness & in sore & angry Struggles – but not trampled down" (*CNB* 1: 1577), he had written:

> Storm all night – the wind scourging & lashing the rain, with the pauses of self-wearying Violence that returns to its wild work as if maddened by the necessity of the Pause / I, half-dozing, list'ning to the same, not without solicitations of the poetic Feeling [...] (*CNB* 1: 1577).

The storm, which Kathleen Coburn points out was "natural, national, domestic, and personal" (*CNB* 1: 1577n), is violent as the wind scourges and lashes the rain, as Britain is at war with France, as the three sisters – Mrs. Southey, Mrs. Lovell and

[14] See especially *CNB* 1: 1577, 1619, 1649 and 1674.

Mrs. Coleridge – quarrel, and as Coleridge suffers both physically and psychologically. Yet in his nightmare he did not feel "downright Fright & prostration" (*CNB* 1: 1577), he was not entirely conquered, and the post-dream emotion is indicative. The storm is engaged in "wild work as if maddened" by its own pauses, but Coleridge half-dozes, listening to the wind and rain, and passively feels "the poetic Feeling" (*CNB* 1: 1577) come upon him. If it were the weather or circumstances that affected his emotions, he would likely be angry or in emotional turmoil, but the "sorrow & pain" (*CNB* 1: 1577) of the dream leave him in a melancholy calm. He notes the "solicitations of the poetic Feeling" (*CNB* 1: 1577) because he could attempt to transfer the strong and affecting post-dream emotions into his poetry. The emotions both in and after dreams, Coleridge knew well, can be powerful and poetic.

It could be argued that Coleridge's emotions are due to his state of health and to the numbness and pains of the opium and withdrawal rather than to the effects of the dreams themselves. To a large extent they probably are. While Coleridge often expressed throughout his adult life emotions of pain, exhaustion, or loneliness after experiencing nightmares, he also continually fought with opium. Yet evidence of post-dream emotions appears elsewhere. After the dream Keats experienced that led to the writing of "A Dream, After Reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca," he felt an intense longing to renew the dream, to "dream it every night" (*KL* 2: 91). This longing is also mingled with a sense of disappointment and perhaps of inadequacy for not being able to reproduce the emotions in his sonnet.

In poetry, similarly, the Poet of Shelley's *Alastor* feels emptiness, a sense of isolation and a longing to renew his dream of the veiled maid. The Poet dreams of his ideal, of a maid whose "voice was like the voice of his own soul," (153) who whispers

"Thoughts the most dear to him" (160) and is "Herself a poet" (161). As they are about to embrace, the vision dissolves and the Poet wakes with a start. Throughout the dream there is no mention of the Poet's emotions and we know his feelings only through the mirror of the emotions attributed to the maid of the dream. When the Poet awakes, he views his surroundings with an aura of emptiness indicative of what he is feeling in the aftermath of the dream:

> Roused by the shock he started from his trance –
> The cold white light of morning, the blue moon
> Low in the west, the clear and garish hills,
> The distinct valley and the vacant woods,
> Spread round him where he stood. Whither have fled
> The hues of heaven that canopied his bower
> Of yesternight? The sounds that soothed his sleep,
> The mystery and the majesty of Earth,
> The joy, the exultation? His wan eyes
> Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
> As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven (192-202).

Where the dream had been warm and airy, the maid kindled with fire, glowing and veiled, the Poet now sees only cold, bright, distinct surroundings. The "hues of heaven" (197) have vanished and left him with "cold white light" (193), a "blue moon" (193), no sun, and a view harshened by "clear" (194) and "distinct" (195) lines. The beauty is gone with the dream and he is left feeling alone, empty, and vacant. His loss is greater than the dissolving of a dream; it is the dissolving of "The mystery and the majesty of Earth, / The joy, the exultation" (199-200), a vision of

heaven, of the innermost truths of his heart. It is a loss of the ideal, which is, to come full circle, the loss of a dream.

The emotions in and after dreams are not only powerfully affecting; they are such that many readers may identify with them. When a poet wishes to evoke strong emotions in the reader, he may bring the reader to recall the emotions that most have at one time or another felt in or after their own dreams. Dreams were significant to many Romantic writers, not only for, as in Coleridge's case, "solicitations of the poetic Feeling" (*CNB* 1: 1577), but also, as in *Alastor*, for bringing readers to share some of the most intense feelings that may be familiar to them.[15] Dreams provide a connection between the rational realism of our waking selves and the emotional sensitivity that poetry often aims to evoke. They provide a bridge for the reader to tread familiar ground into sympathy with the poet or his characters.

When Byron says that dreams "leave a weight upon our waking thoughts" ("The Dream" 7), part of the weight may come from post-dream emotions, but as the weight is left on the dreamer's thoughts, part also must be the ideas that are stimulated by dreams. Intense emotion can leave the thoughts burdened with anxiety to analyze and understand the emotions, and are certainly a weight upon one's thoughts. However, as A. C. Spearing notices in his introduction to *Reading Dreams*, dreaming also "feels charged with significance: unlike events in waking life, nothing in a dream seems to be trivial or unimportant."[16] Waking from a dream that seems particularly significant may leave the mind dazzled with inspiration or revelation, or puzzled, trying to understand the meaning of the dream. The logic of dreams is confused, but

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[15] I do not wish to insinuate that Shelley only wrote the dream in *Alastor* to evoke an emotional response. I wish only to note that, when writing it, Shelley would have been aware of the effect that the post-dream emotions would have on readers.

[16] Spearing, introduction, *Reading Dreams*, 1.

the feeling that it is charged with significance could leave one's thoughts engaged in trying to disentangle the seeming allegory.

While some dreams may "leave a weight upon our waking thoughts" ("The Dream" 7), others, Byron notices, can accomplish quite the opposite, banishing all cares in favour of fiction and an imaginary world as "They take a weight from off our waking toils" (8). In 1808 Coleridge spoke of sleep as renewal; for "the vast majority of the Wrongs met with in Life [...], a one night's Sleep provides the oblivion & the Cure" (*CNB* 3: 3309). In Keats's "Sleep and Poetry" sleep is the "Soft closer of our eyes! / Low murmurer of tender lullabies! / Light hoverer around our happy pillows!" (11-13). Peaceful sleep and delightful dreams can make one forget all waking cares. Romantic poets recognized the fiction-like qualities of dreams and the ability, like poetry or drama, to take the dreamer to highly imaginative worlds. Coleridge called dreaming the "highest degree" of illusion (*CLL* 2: 266) and often compared it to drama.[17] Dreams, they noticed, work like fiction to whisk the dreamer away to another place and time, providing a restful diversion from the hardships of the waking world.

Byron's assertion that dreams "do divide our being" ("The Dream" 9) is provocative. In one sense dreams are another life lived at night, completely separate from that which is lived by day. They compose a world of their own – animated, alive, and in which the dreamer exists imaginatively. In another sense, they "divide our being" (9) into the part that is lying in bed asleep, and the part that, within the dream, is involved in some action or drama. Yet dreams, Byron recognized, also challenge the entire concept of self. We recognize our conscious self as *I*, but the

[17] Coleridge's thoughts on the relationship between dreaming, illusion and drama are discussed further in chapter one and chapter three.

unconscious self poses problems. [18] At times a dreamer may feel that it is himself in the dream yet he may look completely different from his waking self, while at other times he may not identify with any of the characters in his dream. The waking self also seldom takes responsibility for the actions of the dreaming self. He does not feel that the actions of the dream were his own actions. Eighteenth-century philosophers had sought to define the self; dreams, to many Romantic poets, were the integral exception.[19]

Coleridge laboured throughout his lifetime to know and thoroughly understand himself, but dreams threatened to destroy this. He felt a split in the self and feared the one in sleep. In waking he felt in control of his morality, but in sleep he had no control at all over his thoughts, his actions, his self. He did not want to take responsibility for his shameful dreams, but knew he had himself created the dream. If he wanted to believe in one unified self, then they could be the responsibility of no one else. He had dreamt it, and, as he says in "The Pains of Sleep," "My own or others still the same" (1.2: 31). When, in *Das Kampaner Thal*, Jean Paul Richter asked if "the soul of Socrates imprisoned in Borgia's body as in a mud bath" would "lose its moral powers, and [...] suddenly change its virtuous qualities for vicious ones,"[20] Coleridge replied in his marginalia,

> Alas! [...] Who would not gladly answer, No! and who, that has known the dreams and the passions and impulses that agitate the Soul in ~~Cases~~ the Dreams of aggravated Indigestion, but must feel a momentary hesitation in returning that Answer? (*CM* 4: 268).

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[18] Jennifer Ford also discusses Coleridge and the split in self. See Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 37 – .
[19] For further information on Eighteenth-century philosophy and the self, see Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century*, Routledge Studies in Eighteenth Century Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2000).
[20] Translation given by editors in *CM* 4: 268.

Indeed Coleridge's hesitation, as Jennifer Ford demonstrates, lasted throughout his lifetime; he sought to discover the constitution of the "I," of self-identity, but continually stumbled when trying to reconcile his theories with his experiences in sleep.[21] In dreams the self of one's conscious waking state is often absent or changed. Other characters people the stage, many unknown, and the dreamer may himself be someone he does not in his waking life know or recognize. He may even meld from one character to another as did Coleridge in a dream of 1803 which "began in two *Images* – in two Sons of a Nobleman" but as "my Interest for them, I suppose, increased, I became they – the duality vanished" (*CNB* 1: 1649). The projection of the self onto the dream characters, or rather the empathizing so wholly with them inevitably means the loss of what one knows as self. Ford effectively argues that "The terrifying experience of certain dreams confirms [Coleridge's] philosophical opinion that the self, the 'I', cannot 'be conceived as the *whole* mind.'"[22] The mind can only know part of itself – dreams are evidence, for Coleridge, of the apparently inaccessible regions that exist divided from the waking self.[23]

Dreams were especially intriguing to Romantic thinkers for the exceptions they provided to the rules, as with theories of the self, and for their paradoxical nature. Even as Byron says that dreams "divide our being" (Byron, "The Dream" 9), he also asserts that "they become / A portion of ourselves as of our time" (9-10). Dreams are, he says, a part of us, making up our night thoughts, being both created and experienced by the imagination. But they are also a portion of the *self* as our being becomes the dreamer and as the experiences of the dream mould and educate the waking self. They are a part of our time as they take possession of and occupy our sleeping hours. They are a part of our era, a part of our cultural time when they pass

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[21] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 49-51.

over into our waking conversations and our literature, and as conversation and literature pass over into our dreams. Dreams, Byron maintains, are a portion, and only a portion, of us, but are nevertheless a significant component that is universal to all.

If a poem is to be considered visionary it must provide insight or wisdom that goes beyond the ordinary. If a dream can be thought to be in some sense prophetic, then a poem that claims to be a dream could be validated as visionary. Of course the masses did not revert to an ancient belief that dreams are prophecy – although it might be noted that dream interpretation books, such as the *Oneiriocritica* of Artemidorus, were popular and many were read by Coleridge.[24] However, Byron still insists that dreams

> [...] look like heralds of eternity;
>
> They pass like spirits of the past, – they speak
>
> Like sibyls of the future [...] ("The Dream" 11-13).

Because dreams seem "charged with significance,"[25] they have often been interpreted as a spiritual communication, a connection with an inner source of knowledge or truth, or a proof of our immortality. In the letters, essays and notes of some of the poets, there at times appears an unwillingness to dismiss certain possibilities entirely.

Coleridge provides an example because he completely dismissed the prophecies of visionaries as fallacies, yet felt "there is doubtless a sort of *divining* power in man" that can be accessed in dreams (*CM* 1: 163). He dismissed prophetic visions as dreams mistaken for waking perceptions including those of Luther, Jakob Böhme, and Swedenborg, but at the same time remained faithfully intrigued by his

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[22] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 50.
[23] See Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 52-53.
[24] See *CNB* 3: 4409 and 4409n.
[25] Spearing, introduction, *Reading Dreams*, 1.

own dreams and by the possibilities they raised in conjunction with the subconscious mind.[26] As Kathleen Coburn says, "He rejected an unthinking belief in omens and dreams (as in witchcraft), but saw too the possible connexions of these with buried mental processes" (*CLL* 2: 202n). In 1826 Coleridge acknowledged the distinction:

> There is a great difference in the credibility to be attached to stories of dreams and stories of ghosts. Dreams have nothing in them which are absurd and nonsensical; and, though most of the coincidences may be readily explained by the diseased system of the dreamer, and the great and surprising power of association, yet it is impossible to say whether an inner sense does not really exist in the mind, seldom developed, indeed, but which may have a power of presentiment (*CTT* 2: 46).

From one who dreamed so vividly, so affectingly, it is not entirely surprising that he could not easily dismiss the seeming significance of dreams. If Coleridge the rationalist could not put his entire faith in the idea and wanted proof, he could at least consider that it was not entirely impossible:

> All the external senses have their correspondents in the mind; the eye can see an object before it is distinctly apprehended; – why may there not be a corresponding power in the soul? The power of prophecy might have been merely a spiritual excitation of this dormant faculty (*CTT* 2: 46-7).

The idea of an inner knowledge could be comforting when thought of as a connection to God and as a hint of a realm beyond the one we experience in this life. It would

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[26] For an example of Coleridge's opinion on the visions of Luther see *CF* 1: 144-47; on those of Jakob Böhme see *CM* 1: 558; on those of Swedenborg see *CNB* 4: 5380. It should be noted that Coleridge did believe Böhme to be visionary in some respects, but also felt that certain assertions were the "dreams of his over-excited Nerves, phantoms and witcheries from the cauldron of his own seething Fancy" (*CM* 1: 558).

strengthen the possibility of resurrection in death, and it could provide a sense of truth, a sense that we could achieve and could understand truth.

Lamb also suggests that dreams may be "heralds of eternity," "sibyls of the future" (Byron, "The Dream" 11, 13) in his essay "That We Should Rise with the Lark." While his satirical and joking tones in his essays can make it difficult to define his true beliefs, his comments show that the ideas were at least familiar to Romantic readers. He says that dreams are "spiritual communications" that "seem to us to have as much significance as our waking concerns" (*LW* 2: 270). He maintains that they give glimpses of the eternal and instruct as to what the future holds, that they seem to "import us more nearly, as more nearly we approach by years to the shadowy world, whither we are hastening" (*LW* 2: 270). They introduce the living to the "spiritual presence" that will be encountered in the afterlife:

> We delight to anticipate death by such shadows as night affords. [...] The abstracted media of dreams seem no ill introduction to that spiritual presence, upon which, in no long time, we expect to be thrown. [...] Therefore, we cherish dreams. We try to spell in them the alphabet of the invisible world; and think we know already, how it shall be with us (*LW* 2: 270-71).

Lamb is only jokingly referring to the phantoms of his nightmares as ghosts from the afterlife, but the ideas themselves are similar to the more serious postulations of certain other Romantic writers that sleep prepares the soul for death and that dreams could be spiritual communications either externally from God or, more commonly in Romantic poetry, from an inner source of truth.

Wordsworth picks up these same ideas throughout his poetry. In "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" he reverses Shakespeare's "our little life / Is rounded with

a sleep"[27] to "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting."[28] Here the waking is into eternal life, while mortality is "but a sleep." Yet birth is a process of falling asleep, of forgetting, because in childhood all things retain a "visionary gleam," "The glory and the freshness of a dream."[29] It is an understanding of a spiritual realm as he explains in the preface.[30] In one of a series of sonnets "To Sleep" he asks if dreams have visionary gleams as well: "O GENTLE Sleep! do they belong to thee, / These twinklings of oblivion?"[31] Wordsworth often wonders about the visionary possibilities of dreams, though he speculates and asks with poetic artistry, rather than asserting with certainty.

De Quincey likewise suggests that dreams have insight into eternal truths, that they communicate with the spiritual world. In *Suspiria de Profundis* he argues,

> The machinery for dreaming planted in the human brain was not planted for nothing. That faculty, in alliance with the mystery of darkness, is the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy. And the dreaming organ, in connexion with the heart, the eye, and the ear, compose the magnificent apparatus which forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain, and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirrors of the sleeping mind (*DQ* 15: 130).

De Quincey's description is complex, suggesting that the dreaming faculty is at once a profound and mysterious communicator with the world of eternity and at the same time merely a reflection of the world that, like the heart, eye and ear, allows the

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[27] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 4.1: 157-58 as quoted earlier in the chapter.
[28] Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "*Poems in Two Volumes*," 58.
[29] Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "*Poems in Two Volumes,*" 56, 5.
[30] William Wordsworth, *Preface* to "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (Fort Worth, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967) 279.

human mind to see and to understand what is before it. It is a part of the imagination, and that is its essential relation to eternal truths and insight, for it is the imagination that understands, that "forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life" (*DQ* 15: 130) onto the screen of the dreaming mind.

Though dreams may be said to "speak / Like sibyls of the future" (Byron, "The Dream" 12-13), this does not necessarily only suggest a spiritual communication. When, in his essay "On Dreams," Hazlitt says "The power of prophesying or foreseeing things in our sleep, as from a higher and more abstracted sphere of thought, need not be here argued / upon" (*Hz* 8: 19), he dismisses the possibility in such a way as to suggest it is in fact arguable. Nevertheless he is unwilling to argue the case and opts for what he sees as a more plausible explanation, that there is "a sort of profundity in sleep" that may be "consulted as an oracle in this way" (*Hz* 8: 19). Things that we know but do not acknowledge or realize that we know, he argues, may "come upon us as unexpected revelations" when our "voluntary power is suspended" in sleep (*Hz* 8: 19). Though Hazlitt does not use the term, he is suggesting that dreams access what is *subconsciously*, or as he says, almost unconsciously, known to be true.

The idea leads Hazlitt further along similar lines to notice that there are truths discovered in sleep that are unacknowledged in waking because they are unknowingly repressed. Hazlitt says, "We are not hypocrites in our sleep" (*Hz* 8: 20) – when asleep "our imagination wanders at will" (*Hz* 8: 20) (very different, I might add, from the lack of will and the random and illogical wanderings of the dreaming mind in eighteenth-century associationist philosophy), and focuses upon our true passions.

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[31] William Wordsworth, "To Sleep," *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth: Miscellaneous*

"When awake, we check these rising thoughts, and fancy we have them not," but "In dreams, when we are off our guard, they return securely and unbidden" (*Hz* 8: 20). We may "repress any feelings of this sort that we disapprove" of, deny that we feel a certain passion, but, Hazlitt insists, "in sleep we reveal the secret to ourselves" (*Hz* 8: 20). Dreams are "sibyls of the future" (Byron, "The Dream" 13) because they access subconscious truths.

Returning to Byron's lines on dreams as prophecy, it is essential to note that he does not (and never would) say that they *are* prophetic. Rather they "look *like* heralds of eternity" and "speak / *Like* sibyls of the future" (11-13; my emphasis). At the same time, they "pass like spirits of the past" (12) as the dreamer's memory is washed over and any apparent truths that may have been revealed are obliterated, leaving him with nothing more than scattered and confused fragments. Tied between two statements that are approaching the validity of dreams as visionary, the idea that "They pass like spirits of the past" (12) almost anchors the ideas of prophecy in reality, negating the possibility that they are in fact eternal truths in its reminder that dreams are the random associations of previously experienced sensations. They "pass like spirits of the past" (12) because they are our past.

That the majority of the images and events in dreams arise from the sights and experiences of the waking self was generally acknowledged and accepted as fact in the Romantic era. The apparent creativity of dreams may have at times inspired the era's writers, but many realized that for an imagined image to have a defined form, each component would have to have been seen before. Hobbes's famous example of an imagined object is the mythological creature, the centaur: no one has ever seen a centaur, but the imagination compounds the familiar sights of a man and a horse to

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Sonnets, etc., ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946) 1-2.

create the new image.[32] Likewise, Hobbes maintained in 1651 that "The imaginations of them that sleep, are those we call *Dreams*. And these also [...] have been before [...] in the Sense."[33] Though theorists later altered these assertions somewhat, the view that most (if not all) dreams were made up of previous sensations was still largely acknowledged in the Romantic era. In Keats's letters of February 14 and March 4, 1820 he tells of a "psalm singing nightmare" (*KL* 2: 271), which the sight of a "methodist meeting Picture" (*KL* 2: 260) had given him. In 1821 Lamb wrote, concerning a picture of a witch raising up Samuel that he had seen as a child, "That detestable picture, as I have said, gave the fashion to my dreams" (*LW* 2: 67). He then says that if he had never seen the picture his fears would have come "self-pictured in some shape or other" (*LW* 2: 67), but then lists "bear, black man, or ape" (*LW* 2: 67) – all of which exist and of which he would before then have seen pictures. Interestingly this is the very opposite of a writer being inspired by a dream; reading sparks an imagined picture that comes to life in dreams. In 1820[34] and 1826, Coleridge similarly attributes the images of some of his nightmares to something other than his own imagination. Although the images of ruins and prisons would have been furnished elsewhere since this is not a visual medium, Swedenborg's written descriptions of hell are recalled in Coleridge's sleep:

> Since I first read Swedenborg's De Cœlo et de Inferno ex Auditis et Visis, ~~p 119, § .299~~ every horrid Dream, that I have, my thoughts involuntarily turn to the passage in p. 119, § .299 (indeed to the whole Book I am indebted for imagining myself always in Hell, i.e. imagining all the wild Chambers, Ruins, Prisons, Bridewells, to be in Hell) (*CNB* 4: 5360).

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[32] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 16.

The scenes of his very literary nightmares he believes come from those images he had visualized when reading Swedenborg. These in turn will have originated, Coleridge would have recognized, in visual images of each component – perhaps, though he does not say as much – in the Piranesi engravings of the "Carceri d'Invenzione" ("Imaginary Prisons") that he once described to De Quincey.[35] These images, Coleridge acknowledges, have been in the mind previous to his experiencing the dream.

Perhaps the greatest example of a Romantic writer who believed that dreams are made up of previously visualized images is De Quincey. In the "Preliminary Confessions" of his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, written in 1821, he provides a narrative of his youthful adventures partly for the purpose of "furnishing a key to some parts of that tremendous scenery which afterwards peopled the dreams of the Opium-eater" (*DQ* 2: 12). Throughout the *Confessions*, De Quincey demonstrates the relation between his waking experiences and his dreams. His wanderings in the labyrinth of London's back alleys "came back and haunted my sleep" (*DQ* 2: 50); the Malay who came to his cottage "fastened afterwards upon my dreams, and brought other Malays with him worse than himself" (*DQ* 2: 58); and his reading of Livy on the *Consul Romanus* as well as of the English Parliamentary War, "having furnished me often with matter of reflection, now furnished me with matter for my dreams" (*DQ* 2: 68). While some poets may have at times pondered the possibility that dreams can convey eternal truth or wisdom that was until then unknown to the dreamer, most, like

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[33] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 17.
[34] See *CNB* 4: 4689 for the entry from 1820. The one I have quoted is from 1826.
[35] *DQ* 2: 68. This citation is from the 1821 *Confessions*, which are quoted throughout the present chapter rather than the more extensive 1856 version as this chapter seeks to convey those ideas that were present in the Romantic period. The 1821 *Confessions*, because of its publication date, will have had a more direct influence on Romantic thought and will, itself, be more directly indicative of contemporary thought. With it there is no danger of representing Romantic ideas with a text, such as the 1856 *Confessions*, that could be influenced by the evolution of dream theories.

De Quincey, acknowledged that the majority of dreams are memories of images previously experienced by their waking mind, though often confusingly reordered or changed.

Dreams and nightmares have, as has been previously discussed, an intense emotional impact on the dreamer both during and after the somnial experiences. The "tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy" (Byron, "The Dream" 6) can be so overpowering that the dreamer may feel a loss of control. It may be this to which Byron is referring in lines 13 and 14 of "The Dream:" "they have power – / The tyranny of pleasure and of pain;" however, had the lines been written by Coleridge, they might also have been referring to a far more powerful tyranny. Part of the reason that dreams had such an emotional impact on Coleridge is the moral dilemma they could present. Dreams of a sexual nature left the wakened Coleridge with the pain of feeling that he had sinned.[36] In September 1803, in a first draft of "The Pains of Sleep" sent in a letter to Southey, Coleridge had mentioned "sensual Passion" (2.2: 25) among the wild experiences of his sleep, and ended the poem by asking why he is tortured thus when his soul is "free from [...] sensual Folly" (2.2: 50.1.3). In the waking state he was in control of his morals, but in sleep his dreaming self committed moral wrongs, not only of sensual passion but of "Rage" (2.2: 25) and "Revenge" (2.2: 21) as well, that left him feeling "Soul-stifling Shame" (2.2: 32).

In a well known notebook entry written just three months later, Coleridge wishes to "attempt to explain to myself the Origin of moral Evil from the *streamy* Nature of Association" and wonders, "Do not the bad Passions in Dreams throw light & shew of proof upon this Hypothesis?" (*CNB* 1: 1770). Reason is able to curb evil thoughts, but when reason is suspended in sleep, "bad Passions" (*CNB* 1: 1770) have

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[36] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 124-25.

free reign. It appeared to Coleridge that if reason is not actively censuring thoughts, as in dreaming and at times in daydreaming, the stream of association might lead to immoral or evil thoughts. What this suggests, however, is that the imagination, far from divine, must be the faculty from which the "Origin of moral Evil" (*CNB* 1: 1770) stems. While Coleridge's theory was leading him in this direction, he was far from reconciled to it. Immediately he asks "how this comes to be so difficult" (*CNB* 1: 1770), and then considers the purity of which the imagination is capable in "the blessedness of Innocent Children, the blessedness of sweet Sleep" (*CNB* 1: 1770).

Broaching the same topic again in 1805, Coleridge reiterates his stance on the connection of evil with "the *streamy* Nature of Association" (*CNB* 1: 1770), uncontrolled by reason:

> So akin to Reason is Reality, that what I could *do* with exulting Innocence, I can not always *imagine* with perfect innocence / for Reason and Reality can stop and stand still, ~~by~~ new Influxes from without counteracting the Impulses from within, and *poising* the Thought. But Fancy and Sleep *stream on* [...] (*CNB* 2: 2543).

The imagination has an independence that Coleridge finds at times contrary to himself and to his will. Reason has the power to stop, suspend, or re-direct thoughts, but daydreaming and dreaming provide the dangerous exceptions. In the same passage Coleridge thanks God that he has been of late able to regulate his thoughts and daydreams; he is not, however, able to control his dreams in sleep. Dreams were so provocative because on one hand they appeared to be proof of the power of the creative mind, the individuality of the self and the near divinity of the soul, but on the other hand, and in complete contradiction, they could shed light on the apparently innate nature of evil.

Although this particular reading of Byron's statement about the power of dreams as connected with the origins of evil could only really relate to Coleridge, he is not alone in feeling that their power can be malevolent. Byron called their power a "tyranny" ("The Dream" 14), and Hazlitt felt that they were oppressive. In Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets*, he describes Dante's poetry saying that there is "a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams" (*Hz* 2: 179). Because he is drawing a simile for the "terrible obscurity" (*Hz* 2: 179) in Dante's poetry, he does not elaborate on the obscurity that "oppresses us in dreams" (*Hz* 2: 179), but rather assumes that the latter will be immediately familiar to his listeners and readers. As it is not the obscurity *of* dreams or the act of dreaming, but one *in* dreams, Hazlitt must be referring to the state of innocence and ignorance that a dreamer feels his position to be, and the state of being acted upon or forced to act without control or understanding. In *The Divine Comedy*, as Virgil leads Dante through Hell, Limbo, and Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise, the magnitude and intricacy of the great scheme overwhelms Dante who neither understands (before his guide explains) nor has control over the eternal workings that he sees before him. Because Hazlitt feels that this same obscurity "oppresses us in dreams" (*Hz* 2: 179) – that dreams have, at times, an authoritative, controlling power – he would have to have agreed with Byron that dreams can be tyrannical.

Like Dante's vision in *The Divine Comedy*, dreams are sometimes thought to instruct or to provide a guiding force. In Coleridge's marginalia to Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*, he suggested that we may "Regard Life ~~and~~ in the Body with all [its] infirmities as the education of a Soul, as instruction conveyed in a series of Dreams &

Visions [...]" (*CM* 5: 496).[37] In a notebook entry from May 8, 1826 Coleridge again reveals that he at times saw dreams as education of the soul:

> Was more than commonly opened to the Love of Christ – but have awakened from a dreadful labyrinth of strangling, hell-pretending Dreams – Prayed fervently & with tears – that I might not be suffered ⌐...¬ fall off from my faith & trust in God – but to take this merited chastisement meekly (*CNB* 4: 5375).

It is a situation very closely resembling that of the narrator in "The Pains of Sleep" (written 23 years earlier) with the exception that Coleridge here feels that the punishment is warranted. Dreams, for Coleridge, could be "chastisement" (*CNB* 4: 5375) – punishment for wrongdoings, and a reminder to remain faithful to God in both thought and action. The "horror of [one's] deeds" ("The Pains of Sleep" 1.2: 47) is shown to sinners for their punishment, but also for the education and guidance of their soul.

Although several Romantic writers would not have agreed that the purpose of the education is to remain faithful to God or that it is preparation for the afterlife, some still saw one potential role of dreams as instruction. In Shelley's *Queen Mab* the dream is used as a medium for the education of Ianthe in the ways of the world. Just as Africanus guides Scipio by showing him, in a dream, a vision of society and its politics in Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio*, Queen Mab, the mischievous dreammaker,[38] raises Ianthe's soul from her body in dream to show her the nature of the world, and to teach her of its wrongs and of hope and happiness. If, as Hazlitt maintained in his essay "On Dreams" (*Hz* 8: 15-21), dreams are thought to impart wisdom that is

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[37] The date of this marginalia is uncertain. The editors date it sometime after 1816, perhaps 1820-26.
[38] Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat explain that Queen Mab is described as such in *Romeo and Juliet* 1.4: 53-94, and featured in numerous nineteenth-century children's books. See Shelley, *Queen Mab, Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 15n.

already known but is denied or unrecognized by the conscious mind, one may consider dreams to partake in a kind of instruction as that knowledge is made known consciously. When Byron says dreams "make us what we were not – what they will" ("The Dream" 15), he is suggesting that by their own will – as opposed to God's will in Coleridge's view – dreams mould and shape the dreamer, and add a new dimension to his character and personality.

Yet the shaping and moulding that Byron considers dreams to achieve is not necessarily education and instruction. The possibility is vaguely suggested, but Byron also implies that, as W. Paul Elledge notes, "dreams disfigure the truth of our past by illusory enhancement or detraction, making us 'what we were not' (l. 15)."[39] Dreams may emulate reality, but they often involve distortion. They take our experiences and rearrange them, changing the old experience and adding new and quite different ones. Byron then adds that dreams "shake us with the vision that's gone by, / The dread of vanish'd shadows" (16-17). Dreams "make us what we were not" (15) – they mould us and change our character – yet again when they leave us affected with post-dream emotions and with wonder at the origin and nature of the dream.

When Byron asks if dreams are really shadows – "Are they so?" (17) – he may be referring to the notion that has reappeared throughout history that dreams are caused by angels, devils, or spirits. In Homer and Virgil, a god or goddess appearing to the dreamer either for good or evil purposes causes most of the dreams. The god appears to the dreamer in sleep, but occupies a position in the room where the sleeper lays:

> In the tradition of Greek and Roman literature, the dream is personified as a shape that stands at the head of the dreamer. The quality of the

> dream is already indicated by the position of the dream; if it is oppressive, it squats heavily on the dreamer [...] but if the dream is illuminating, it assumes the position of a guardian angel.[40]

These personified dreams, which have an existence that is external from the mind of the dreamer, continuously appear in poetry. In *The Metamorphoses*, Morpheus, the son of the god Somnus (Sleep) is himself a dream.[41] In *The Faerie Queene*, Archimago sends a "Sprite" to Hecate (the queen of Hades and goddess of dreams[42]) requesting "A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent," which, when sent to the Redcrosse Knight, sits "upon his hardy head [...] / And made him dreame of loves and lustfull play."[43] Likewise, Satan is the cause of Eve's disturbing dream in *Paradise Lost* as in the form of a toad he sits by her ear forging "Illusions as he list, phantasms and dreams."[44]

In the Romantic era, Fuseli famously depicted dreams in this manner in several of his paintings. In *The Nightmare* there appears a devil squatting on the dreamer's chest while in *Queen Mab* the beautiful guardian angel hovers above the dreamer.[45] In Shelley's *Queen Mab* the fairy appears in the same way, as her pageant flies through the air to raise the soul of the sleeping Ianthe, while in "Marianne's Dream" the prophecy told in her dream is conveyed by a "phantom pale."[46] Likewise

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[39] W. Paul Elledge, "Divided Being: The Mind in Byron's 'The Dream,'" *The Cast of Consciousness: Concepts of the Mind in British and American Romanticism*, ed. Beverly Taylor and Robert Bain, Contributions to the Study of World Literature 24, (New York: Greenwood, 1987) 106.
[40] Aleida Assmann, "Engendering Dreams: The Dreams of Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 297.
[41] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, ed. E. J. Kenney, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 267-9, 479.
[42] See note on p.17 of Edmund Spenser, *Edmund Spenser's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed., Norton Critical Ed. (New York: Norton, 1993) 17n.
[43] Spenser, *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, 1.1: 43 and 47.
[44] John Milton, *Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, ed. Scott Elledge, 2nd ed., Norton Critical Ed. (New York: Norton, 1993) 4: 803.
[45] Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781, Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, MI; and Henry Fuseli, *Queen Mab*, 1814, Collection Carl Laszlo, Basel, Switz.
[46] Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley*, 141.

a personified dream that had been hovering over a sage's pillow (1: 723-30) is presented to Prometheus in act 1 of *Prometheus Unbound*, while a dream appears objectively as a shape and speaks to Asia and Panthea in act 2 (2.1: 127-32). Blake's "A Dream" describes "a dream [that] did weave a shade, / O'er my Angel-guarded bed."[47] In Keats's *Endymion* the goddess Cynthia causes the dreams of the shepherd when she appears to him. In all of these examples dreams are depicted as existing externally and objectively, yet it should be noted that the purpose, while posing imaginative and alternative possibilities for dream theory, is artistic and is unlikely to convey the poet or artist's own beliefs upon the source of dreams. Following in a literary tradition, most poets would more likely have depicted externally existing dreams for creative and dramatic purposes.

With scant and questionable evidence, Jennifer Ford argues that Coleridge was "often inclined to [this] well-known dream theory: the spirit theory, which argues that dreams are caused by certain spirits, who enter the dreamer's mind and shape a dream at will."[48] While there is no doubt that he knew of and was interested by such theories, it is difficult to be convinced by Ford's arguments that Coleridge in fact believed them. Ford claims for her first piece of evidence "The Pains of Sleep," saying that "Nothing within the mind appears to be the cause of such nightly horrors, but instead, a 'fiendish crowd / Of shapes and thoughts' is blamed."[49] However, nothing in the poem suggests that the "fiendish crowd" (1.2: 16) has an external existence and in truth suggests quite the opposite: since the dreamer "Up-start[s] from the fiendish crowd" (1.2: 16) when he is "Awaking" (2.2: 16), their existence can only be within the mind of the dreamer. They are "shapes and thoughts" (1.2: 17) not

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[47] William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, rev. ed., (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1988) 1-2.
[48] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 142.
[49] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 143.

because they are externally existing spirits who affect the mind, but because they are a crowd of shapes seen in the dream who exist solely as his thoughts. The shapes physically and visually (within the dream) torture him while his thoughts psychologically, non-visually torture as well, but Coleridge is also suggesting that the shapes are his thoughts. Coleridge may have felt that the dreams referred to in the poem were God's punishment (albeit unjust in his eyes) and therefore from a possibly external source, but this is a suggestion that Ford does not clearly make. No proof is apparent in "The Pains of Sleep" that the dreamer is tortured by an externally existing "fiendish crowd" (1.2: 16).

Ford's second piece of evidence for Coleridge's belief in spirits who cause dreams is a quotation from a letter in which Coleridge says, "As to Stutfield, I could almost wish that some Incubus would get into Bed with him, & blow with a bellows the Wind of *cold* colic against *his* Posteriors" (*CL* 1: 526). Ford admits the comic portrayal of the incubus, but still insists unfoundedly that "its power to cause nightmares is unquestioned."[50] At no point in this quotation does Coleridge seriously admit to believing in incubi and it should be remembered that this is the same man who vocally deplored superstition and who, although a religious man, blatantly dismissed the claims of religious visionaries to have seen angels, devils or spirits.[51] In 1808 in his "Lectures on the Principles of Poetry" Coleridge explained that a nightmare is caused by physical discomfort and that "the mind, I say, in this case deceived by ~~her~~ past experience attributes the painful sensation received to a correspondent ~~cause~~ Agent – An assassin, for instance, stabbing at the Side, or a Goblin sitting on the Breast, &c" (*CLL* 1: 136). A year later in *The Friend*, and again in 1818 when he last revised the essays, Coleridge maintained that when in the state

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[50] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 145.

between waking and sleeping, those (such as Luther) who believe they see supernatural beings are blending the visions of dreams with the real objects of the room in which they are half-asleep.[52] It would be difficult indeed to prove that Coleridge himself believed the same superstitions that he often took pains to demonstratively prove wrong.

Ford then moves to another quotation from a letter where, in a time of illness, Coleridge says that when half-asleep he has "seen armies of ugly Things bursting in" upon him (*CL* 1: 348). While she admits that Coleridge is referring to "dreamatis personae" – a term Coleridge later gave to the characters of his dreams[53] – she again with no foundation maintains that "their presence also suggests that it is something else that caused the dream, something external to the dreamer."[54] Coleridge would have recognized an external cause, but it would have been his illness, discomfort and – though he may or may not have realized – the effects of opium and withdrawal, not, as Ford suggests, spirits or incubi.

The next letter that Ford presents is interesting for the language that Coleridge uses. Writing to A. Welles, Coleridge hopes that "in consequence of your Medicine I should be at length delivered from these sore Visitations" (*CL* 2: 986). Focusing on the words "delivered" and "Visitations" (*CL* 2: 986), Ford insists that "The onus for [the dream's] formation and content falls outside the dreamer, on to some kind of strange being, who seems to be dissevered from Coleridge's psyche but who also, regardless of the contrary effort, must belong to some part of that psyche" and that "embedded within that description is the view that those nightmares are caused by

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[51] For example, see *CLL* 1: 131; *CLL* 2: 202n; *CF* 1: 139-43; *CF* 1: 144-47.
[52] See *CF* 1: 139-40 and cross-reference with *CF* 1: 67.
[53] See Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 36-37 for an explanation of the use of the term in Coleridge's notebooks.
[54] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 145.

something or someone else."[55] Coleridge's choice of the words "delivered" and "Visitations" (*CL* 2: 986) is intriguing. The words do dramatically conjure images of a helpless dreamer possessed by evil demons and of divine deliverance. However, the words are dramatic, not literal. The actual cause as Coleridge saw it, is not, as Ford says, "some kind of strange being,"[56] but his illness. If Coleridge wished to be saved from evil spirits he would be pleading with God. It is not divine deliverance that he is seeking, but deliverance through "Medicine" (*CL* 2: 986). The words "deliverance" and "Visitations" contribute to a metaphor that Coleridge is using in order to convey his intense nightly suffering and to elevate Welles, who has generously sent him something for his gout, to the position almost of divine deliverer. Coleridge continues by suggesting that he evince his gratitude by becoming a preacher and founding a sect in honour of Welles, the humour and exaggeration of which confirm the context. Coleridge readily recognized that if "Medicine" (*CL* 2: 986) were administered to cure or anesthetize the pain of his illness, he would be "delivered" (*CL* 2: 986) from the external cause of his dreams: his pain.

Ford presents a critical work that focuses almost entirely on the medical aspects of Coleridge's interest in dreams and the imagination, and that often skips over or dismisses his more spiritual, imaginative and metaphysical interests. It is odd then that Ford argues for such a highly imaginative belief in a poet she claims – using evidence almost entirely from his prose and notes rather than his poetry – is otherwise more predominantly concerned with a physiological and medical theory of dreams. I would agree that Coleridge was more concerned with physiology than perhaps was acknowledged previous to works such as those by Ford and Alan Richardson;[57]

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[55] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 146.
[56] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 146.
[57] See especially Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).

however, Coleridge's physiological interests were only one small part of his interest in dream and need to be put in perspective. To Coleridge physical sensations in the body could trigger dreams, but this was only one cause and certainly not an explanation of the nature or significance of dreams. It does not, as Ford argues, negate Coleridge's interest in dream as the poetic ideal, nor insist that his theories of the imagination were materialist and medical. The history of criticism on the Romantic imagination is not wrong: Coleridge was very interested in the mystery of dreams, in their possible connections to an inner and an eternal spiritual world, and in their relation to thought, knowledge and to reading or writing poetry. Ford does not give a balanced representation of Coleridge's physical and non-physical interests. Yet Ford's arguments for "the spirit theory,"[58] which seem to attempt to show the other side of Coleridge, are weak and therefore do not demonstrate the balance appropriately. She does not accurately portray Coleridge's metaphysical and aesthetic interests, and essentially misses the tension in Coleridge's writing between his spiritual beliefs and his need to prove his theories rationally and physiologically with experiential evidence. As I have previously shown, Coleridge did at times wonder if dreams were punishment and education of the soul, which must have been sent by God. If Coleridge could believe this, it could easily follow that he also believed in other spirits, both angelic and demonic. He may even for a time have been convinced by Andrew Baxter's theory of dreams as caused by externally existing spirits. However, Ford has until now presented no concrete evidence of this.

One quotation that Ford gives as evidence that "As late as 1826, Coleridge was still explicitly drawing attention to the existence of nocturnal spirit-creatures"

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[58] Ford refers to the theory by this name throughout her work (including her index). It is a quotation from *CNB* 4: 5360.

(though she notes that he is also "qualifying his belief"),[59] is especially intriguing and does suggest that Coleridge may have noticed the well-known theory for more than simply imaginative, metaphorical and literary reasons. Coleridge quotes Swedenborg who, as previously discussed, has furnished the imagery of his nightmares:

> There are spirits who are not yet in conjunction with hell, because they are still in their first state,... These spirits love things undigested and corrupt, such as putrefying food in the stomach.[60]

Coleridge says that Swedenborg refers to the "spiritual Linguifacture of these Toad-Imps' whispers" (*CNB* 4: 5360), which are the objectively existing spirits who cause dreams in the same way as does Satan in *Paradise Lost* when in the shape of a toad he whispers in Eve's ear and causes her dreams.[61] Coleridge then says that he, himself, "modif[ies] this Miltonic Theory by supposing the Figures in my Dream to *be*, or to be assumed by, the Malignant Spirits themselves" (*CNB* 4: 5360). Since the spirits are the actual figures of his dreams, they do not have the external existence that Ford insists upon. However, they are independently existing beings. Coleridge is allowing his thoughts to wander through possibilities that I believe had suggested themselves to him before. In 1804 Coleridge wrote in his notebook of certain dreams that are not about Sara Hutchinson, "nay – perhaps, all wild – no form, no ~~imago~~ place, no incident, any way connected with her! – What then? Shall I dare say, the whole Dream seems to have been *Her – She*" (*CNB* 2: 2061), and which leads him to ponder "the existence of *a Feeling* of a Person quite distinct at all times, & at certain times *perfectly separable* from, the Image of the Person" (*CNB* 2: 2061), and to see "tho' darkly, that the Inferences hence are many & important / Madness – Bulls – Self –

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[59] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 147.
[60] From Swedenborg's *De Coelo et de Inferno ex Auditis et Visis* as quoted by Coleridge in *CNB* 4: 5360. Coleridge quotes in Latin and the translation that I have used is that which is provided by the editor in 5360n.

God – Past Life + Present; or Conscience, &c – " (*CNB* 2: 2061). At this point Coleridge is speaking only of "*a Feeling*" (*CNB* 2: 2061), not an actual spirit or presence. However, a year later, and in much the same vein, Coleridge wrote, "Thank Heaven! However / Sleep has never yet desecrated the images, or supposed Presences, of those whom I love and revere" (*CNB* 2: 2543) adding a postscript to the word "Presences" that says, "There is often a dim sense of the Presence of a Person in our dreams, whose form does not appear. [/] All the above-going throw lights on my mind with regard to the origin of Evil" (*CNB* 2: 2543). Neither the *"Feelings"* (*CNB* 2: 2061) nor "Presences" (*CNB* 2: 2543) in his dreams are in these cases evil spirits, but the thoughts lead to considerations of madness, self, life and death, God, and the origin of evil. It appears that at times Coleridge did consider the possibility that there may in some way be spirits or presences, evil or otherwise, within his dreams that are independent and separate from his self – a postulation that, if he had thought it to be true, would have a serious impact on his notion of the significance of dreams.

This is not to say, however, that Coleridge believed in a theory of dreams caused by spirits. He may have considered the idea, but he did not fully believe it, as is evidenced by the fact that after postulating that "the Figures in my Dream [are, or are] assumed by, the Malignant Spirits themselves" (*CNB* 4: 5360), he immediately, as Ford says, "qualifi[es] his belief."[62] Coleridge is quick to add that "in serious whole Earnest" the "Spirit-theory may be" "hypochondriacal" (*CNB* 4: 5360), and later ends the entry by saying that in his prayers he is "*inclined* to retain" Jeremy Taylor's phrase to "intreat protection 'from the Spirits of Darkness'," but "the fear of praying what I do not fully believe makes me alter it into – Afflictions of Sleep" (*CNB* 4: 5360). Although he may have wondered about the independence of the

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[61] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* 4: 800-03.

spirits and presences within his dreams, Coleridge did not ever subscribe to the belief that dreams are caused by externally existing, objective spirits.

Ford also more than once maintains that "This belief [that dreams "must be caused by some external form, a kind of spirit that could act on his consciousness and memory"] was a popular one during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and was also widely held within Coleridge's circle of friends."[63] However, she gives only two examples, one of which is Southey[64] – the same Robert Southey whom Coleridge claimed (according to Keats) believed in mermaids.[65] Although the idea that dreams are caused by or are themselves spirits was well known in the eighteenth century and in the Romantic era, it was certainly not widely believed. In an amusing essay written for Hazlitt's *The Round Table*, Leigh Hunt satirizes the notion of spirits causing dreams. In a dream, he converses with the "Prince of the Night-mares," who appears as a devil crouching on his chest.[66] The spirit explains to him that nightmares are caused by feasting on rich foods and are the punishments of the wealthy, tyrannical, and gluttonous. They "have been among mankind, ever since the existence of cooks and bad consciences."[67] While Hunt's cynicism about spirit theories of dreams is likely to be representative of attitudes in his circle, the spirits continued, predominantly for artistic purposes, to make their way into contemporary art and literature.

It is quite unlikely that Byron ever, even under the influence of Shelley in 1816, would have believed that spirits could be the cause of dreams. When he asks if dreams are shadows ("The Dream" 17), he follows it with another, qualifying

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[62] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 147.
[63] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 142.
[64] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 229, n14.
[65] *KL* 2: 88-89.
[66] William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, *The Round Table 1817*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Vol. 1 of 2 vols. in 1, Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834 (Oxford: Woodstock, 1991) 220.

question: "Is not the past all shadow?" (18). Dreams may be shadows without being spectres; they may be echoes of memories, of past experiences, the random association of sensations first felt in waking life. Lines 17 and 18 are juxtaposed – one asking if dreams may be spirits, the other leading to physiological explanations. The tension between the two, the wonder at the possibilities and the grounding of the more probable, realist view, epitomizes the intrigue dreams have held for thousands of years. No single explanation has ever thoroughly explained the phenomenon of dreaming to the satisfaction of all, and the confusion and perhaps even frustration concerning what Coleridge would deem "the mysterious Problem" of dreams (*CNB* 4: 5360) culminate in Byron's question, "What are they?" (18). Though he has made many assertions regarding their nature, dreams are ultimately, he acknowledges, full of paradox, baffling, intriguing, and, in the Romantic era at least, still a mystery.

Just as Byron poses such an unanswerable question, he quickly follows it with the suggestion most pertinent for poetry. Having led the reader to realize the mysteriousness of dreams, he subtly offers a possible answer: are they "Creations of the mind?" (19). Byron suggests rather than asserts, easing the reader into the conviction because when Byron's immense claims for the role of the creative imagination are considered, the apparently simple suggestion takes on significant implications. Having cautiously suggested that the origin of dreams is the mind itself, Byron returns to his confident assertions:

> – The mind can make
>
> Substance, and people planets of its own
>
> With beings brighter than have been, and give
>
> A breath to forms which can outlive all flesh (19-22).

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[67] Hazlitt and Hunt, *The Round Table 1817*, 222.

In its God-like role, the imagination creates worlds more perfect, more ideal than the one experienced in waking, physical reality. Byron challenges empiricist claims that the mind only perceives; it "can *make* / Substance" (19-20; my emphasis). Its "beings" are "brighter" (21) than those that have existed before, both physical and imaginary, because the individual's mind reanimates them with a new imaginative response. With power reminiscent of the Holy Spirit, it *breathes life* into the inanimate by giving form to words on the page. Creator of poetry, it is creator of the immortal, creator of the visions and of the ideas that will live and move in the imaginations of readers for all time. The creations of the imagination are not merely airy and illusory here; Byron insists that they have a substantial, organic, immortal existence even brighter than our own.

Earlier the same year Byron had given in canto 3 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* his reason for writing poetry:

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
>
> A being more intense, that we endow
>
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
>
> The life we image, even as I do now.
>
> What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
>
> Soul of my thought![68]

Through creating in poetry, Byron takes on the life he imagines, which makes him "A being more intense."[69] In the process of creating, the poet becomes like his creations, "beings brighter than have been," which also "become / A portion of ourselves" and "make us what we were not" ("The Dream" 21, 9-10, 15). Charles E. Robinson, in comparing the two passages, says that Byron "judged that a dream intensified

experience in the same manner that a poem did [...]."[70] This is because, to Byron, dreaming, imagining and creating poetry are interrelated processes. The answer to the Romantic poets' interest in dreams lies in this theory of dreams: poetry and dreams alike are "Creations of the mind" ("The Dream" 19), creations of an imagination that is not only God-like, but that can create beings even brighter than those of the real, objective world. They are creations of an immensely powerful imagination far greater than the poet himself, for Byron says, "What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou, / Soul of my thought!"[71] It is the creative power of the imagination, more than any of the other possibilities of the nature and significance of dreams, that holds the key to understanding Romantic interest in dream poetry.

With this ultimate claim for dreams, backed by eighteen lines of further claims, Byron frames his own poem as "a vision which I dream'd / Perchance in sleep" (23-24). That it is only "Perchance" that the vision was seen in sleep, and the fact that he follows this by equating "a thought" (24) and "A slumbering thought" (25) is not the de-emphasizing of the visionary quality of dreams, but rather the emphasizing of the visionary nature of the imagination. Although Byron claims that dreams "have power" (13) and that his dream poem is "a vision" (23), whether it occurs in sleep or in the waking state, it is the creation of the imagination. It is the work of the highest and most beautiful part of the mind and, at the same time, nothing but a fiction as the fleeting thought "capable of years" (25) reduces the whole of "a long life into one hour" (26).

Dreams were important in the Romantic era for the light they, as its creations, shed on the imagination as well as for the shadows and mysteries they cast on any

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[68] George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto 3, The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 46-51.
[69] Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto 3, The Complete Poetical Works*, 2: 47.
[70] Robinson, *Shelley and Byron*, 28.

attempt to thoroughly understand the workings of the mind. They were the exceptions to empirical theories and helped to reintroduce subjective experiences to discussions of the mind. The fact that they elude explanation allowed space for exploration of more creative and imaginative, less physiological theories. It would be an overstatement to say that the Romantic writers or Romantic society believed firmly that dreams are prophecy or inner truth, or that they are caused by evil spirits or indeed by God reprimanding evil deeds. Rather the mystery surrounding the origin and nature of dreams allowed Romantic writers and thinkers to consider the possibilities. These ideas were open to debate and many of them were widely discussed. Rather than being overcome by the insolubility of dreams (although admittedly Coleridge at times came close), many Romantic writers delighted in the mysteriousness of dreams. The insolubility opened the way for creativity. The creativity in dream poetry of the Romantic era reflects the immense implications that the nature and significance of dreams held for the Romantics.

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[71] Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto 3, The Complete Poetical Works*, 2: 50-51.

Chapter Three

Coleridge: "Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream"

Coleridge was interested in dreams throughout his life and some of his most well known poems are intensely involved with the imaginative states of dream and reverie. In "Kubla Khan" when Coleridge uses dream as poetic form he follows yet modernizes the dream-vision tradition, emphasizes the imagination's role in the conception of the poem, and creates a poem that reveals as it represents dream as part of the imaginative process in creativity. The poem communicates, as a dream might, through a seemingly symbolic language and mesmerizes readers with its musical metre and elements of romance. In "Kubla Khan" Coleridge achieves what he saw as the ultimate aim of a poet, to charm the reader into a waking dream.

The fact that "Kubla Khan" has always been considered a dream poem owes much to Coleridge's presentation of it as such in the paratexts. The initial and primary reason why many readers have thought the poem to be transcribed from an actual dream and others have considered it a poem written in the semblance of a dream stems from causes outside of the poem itself: the subtitle and the preface. These framing devices serve to call to the readers' minds certain common conceptions about dreams that affect the way the poem is read.

The subtitle, "A Vision in a Dream," charges the poem with significance by claiming to be not only from a dream, and therefore possibly revealing an inner truth or the natural creativity of the imagination, but also by insisting on its visionary status. Like a dream within a dream, it signals the layering of the imaginative states in the poem, yet it challenges the reader to consider the differences between dream and vision. It is the subtitle that draws the connection between what might otherwise

appear to be two different parts of the poem – the description of the landscape and the vision of the damsel – and explains how the vision "once" seen (1.1: 38[1]) relates to the vision described and thereby conjured in the reader's mind by the poem. In short, it is what alerts the reader to the significance of imaginative states in relation to the poem.

The subtitle has the effect of placing the poem in an imaginative landscape, and emphasizing its imaginative status. Lamb once criticized Coleridge for adding the subtitle "A Poet's Reverie" to the publication of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. He complained,

> – it is as bad as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is not a Lion but only the scenical representation of a Lion. What new idea is gained by this Title, but one subversive of all credit, which the tale should force upon us, of its truth?[2]

The subtitle, Lamb felt, diminished the impact that the poem makes on the reader by claiming merely to be a reverie – a product of the imagination – rather than a tale, which he saw as holding the possibility of truth. Yet he attached the subtitle "A Reverie" to his own prose piece "Dream-Children" and gave the subtitle "A Dream" to "The Child Angel." Coleridge most likely added the subtitle, as Lamb believed, to quell Wordsworth's charges of obscurity. Where Wordsworth felt that the Mariner needed "a character and profession,"[3] Coleridge believed that a fictional character should exist rather in a fictional void of time and space. Years later he would praise Spenser for,

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[1] All quotations from the poetry and prose in the present chapter are taken from the Reading Text as cited here.
[2] Charles Lamb, *The Letters of Charles Lamb to Which are Added Those of his Sister Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, vol. 1 (London: Dent, 1935) 240.
[3] Lamb, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, 1: 240.

> The marvelous independence or true imaginative absence of all particular place & time – it is neither in the domains of History or Geography, is ignorant of all artificial boundary – truly in the Land of Faery – i.e. in mental space – (*CLL* 2: 409-10).[4]

Coleridge admired the purely imaginative literary space that Spenser created precisely because it was not located in the real, material world and so could not be held accountable to such laws. Instead it takes the reader into an imaginative world with no "artificial boundar[ies]" (*CLL* 2: 409) where creativity is given significant freedom. By adding the subtitle "A Poet's Reverie" to *The Ancient Mariner,* Coleridge may have been unnecessarily spelling out, as Lamb believed, the fact that the poem is fictional; however, Coleridge also recognized – as Lamb later would – the advantages of a purely imaginative domain as well as the guidance it gave to the reader to consider the dream-like state of the imagination in creativity. Like "A Poet's Reverie," the subtitle "A Vision in a Dream" emphasizes the imaginative nature of the poem.

The subtitle is a dream-framing device in that like the titles *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* and "The Dream-Fugue" it signals to the reader the fact that it should be read as the representation of a dream. However, more than this, it also subtly invokes the Medieval dream-vision tradition. "In the typical dream-vision," Irene Chayes explains,

> Often there is a further distinction between the initial dream and the particular "vision" the dreamer is allowed to see or participate in once he has entered his new state: the proceedings of the bird parliament, the elaborate organization of the House of Fame, the lover's allegorical

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[4] Cf: *CLL* 1: 289, *CLL* 2: 480 and *CNB* 3: 4501.

progress into the rose garden. It is here that the formal subject of the poem is likely to be introduced, and the unfolding of the inner vision is in effect the process by which the poem about it is composed; but objectively this appears only as a passive, presentational experience for the poet, who stands as an ingenuous and receptive witness before the marvels he may be the last to discover.[5]

Chayes is comparing Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* to Medieval poetry in her article, but the comment sheds light on the subtitle of "Kubla Khan" as well, which also makes a distinction between dream and vision. Additionally, the formal subject of "Kubla Khan" is indeed introduced through the lines on the vision of the damsel, and it is only at that point that the reader can understand the relation between the two.

As was briefly discussed in chapter one, the preface also acts as a dream-framing device. Although the frame appears, unusually, in a prose preface, "Kubla Khan" nevertheless follows, as it modifies, the Medieval dream-vision conventions. The "Author" (511) of the dream-vision retires to a solitary natural setting and is reading when he falls asleep. As with many dream-visions, it is "summer" (511),[6] a point that has confused those who have not read the preface as a fictional narrative and found it in conflict with the autumn date on the Crewe manuscript. It also follows tradition that the book he was reading affects the vision: the passage from *Purchas His Pilgrimage* is transformed in the first several lines of the poem. Had these same conventions appeared in verse the whole would have been readily taken as one reads "The Dream of the Arab," *The Fall of Hyperion,* or *The Triumph of Life* – as a Romantic poem written in the dream-vision tradition.

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[5] Irene Chayes "Dreamer, Poet, and Poem in *The Fall of Hyperion,*" *Philological Quarterly* 46 (1967): 501.

[6] The majority of dream visions take place in spring, May, June or summer. Wordsworth's "Dream of the Arab" and De Quincey's dream writings are also set in summer.

Irene Chayes points out that "Coleridge's prose note amounts to a standard dream-vision prologue, preparing the way for the verse text, which it offers as the presented poem itself."[7] While the preface follows the tradition of, and functions as, a dream-vision prologue, Medieval prologues were invariably in verse and clearly part of the poem. Coleridge modifies the tradition by using prose. In "Prose Prefaces and Romantic Poets: Insinuation and Ethos," John F. Schell shows how some Romantic prefaces by Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley work as "an integral part of the overall poetic strategy."[8] He argues that these poets develop "fictitious authors in the preface whose personality, in turn, reflects back upon the poem for some significant end."[9] Wordsworth's "The Thorn" is the most relevant of these for Coleridge because it is likely he would have known of Wordsworth's intention and because it predates "Kubla Khan's" preface. Wordsworth wrote a prose preface for "The Thorn" in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* that should, he felt, have been in verse as an introductory part of the poem. Wordsworth begins by saying "This poem ought to have been preceded by an introductory poem, which I have been prevented from writing [...]" and ends by way of apology for its prose form: "The reader will have the kindness to excuse this note, as I am sensible that an introductory poem is necessary to give the poem its full effect."[10] Schell explains, "These two apologies, in addition to corroborating the importance of the prose *insinuatio* for the poem, hint at the new relationship between prose preface and poem introduced by the Romantic poets."[11]

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[7] Chayes "Dreamer, Poet, and Poem in *The Fall of Hyperion,*" 502.
[8] John F. Schell, "Prose Prefaces and Romantic Poets: Insinuation and Ethos," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 13.2 (1983): 88.
[9] Schell, "Prose Prefaces and Romantic Poets," 88.
[10] Qtd in Schell, "Prose Prefaces and Romantic Poets," 89.
[11] Schell, "Prose Prefaces and Romantic Poets," 89.

Schell never mentions Coleridge or the preface to "Kubla Khan," but they could well have been included. As Kathleen Wheeler points out, the "Author" is separated from Coleridge by the use of the third person for the fictional dream-vision section, which contrasts with the switch to the first person in the final paragraph for the real action of annexing "The Pains of Sleep."[12] The preface provides a character, a poet, whose dream experience is related in the poem, just as in conventional dream visions. The difference is that, as Schell says of "The Thorn," "The poem now consists of prose and poetry in one imaginative construct, and a new structure exists."[13]

Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge wrote the preface in prose for good reason, because its narrative could equally be taken as factual. In *The Fall of Hyperion* or *The Triumph of Life* readers are aware that the narrative is fiction and that Keats and Shelley never literally had such experiences. However, readers of "Kubla Khan's" preface may be uncertain at what point fact becomes fiction and Romantic readers, who were accustomed to factual introductions, were inclined to believe much of it. Where the preface was believed, any of the suggestions dream evoked in the era, as outlined in chapter two, could be implied. Some might have seen the poem as visionary or inspired, while others might see it as from the unconscious or another inner source of truth. Still others may have been intrigued by the poem as a "psychological curiosity" (511) believing it to show a glimpse of the workings of the human mind or soul. The preface could give authority to both poem and poet through its close connection with the imagination – the poem could be seen as the imagination's own natural creation; the poet as having a powerful imagination. As David Perkins notes, "If, as several commentators assume, Coleridge wished in the

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[12] K. M. Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 21.

introductory note to minimize the import of *Kubla Khan*, to describe it as a dream was not an effective method."[14] Yet if anyone should be sceptical and not accept the preface as fact, it still reads as a literary dream frame. Because of the placing of the dream frame, Coleridge both follows in the dream-vision tradition and subtly claims visionary authority for himself as for his poem.

It is only the guiding frames of the preface and subtitle that directly lead readers to view "Kubla Khan" as a dream poem – nothing in the poem itself says as much. Nevertheless "Kubla Khan" remains distinctively a dream poem. When the preface and subtitle are set aside, it is difficult to dismiss the feeling that the poem has a strange dream-like quality about it. This dreamy atmosphere is, I would argue, a waking-dream experience that Coleridge creates for his readers as the highest state of poetic illusion.

Coleridge's many writings about dreams, not only in his notebooks, but also in *The Friend*, his lectures, and the *Biographia Literaria*, attest to his fascination with what he saw as the imagination's works of fiction. Dreams were strange and fantastic dramas that seemed almost miraculously created by the mind without any aid of what the dreamer refers to as himself. Although upon waking they often appear nonsensical, within the dream they can be, as Coleridge was continually reminded, emotionally affecting and sometimes completely terrifying. Coleridge was particularly intrigued by the fact that a dreamer passes no judgement in dreams, accepting with full faith all that is happening.[15] The dream places its viewer in a state of poetic faith, he recognized, that could be enviable to all poets and playwrights.

Indeed, Coleridge believed that the *aim* of a poet is to create a state of illusion for the reader, a state that is akin to, differing only in degree from, dreaming (*CLL* 2:

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[13] Schell, "Prose Prefaces and Romantic Poets," 89.

266). In his December 1818 lecture on *The Tempest*, Coleridge explains stage illusion by referring to dreaming and continues on to align dreaming with "the perusal of a deeply interesting Novel" (*CLL* 2: 266). At other times he compares fiction, particularly *The Arabian Nights*, with dreaming,[16] claiming that in these "there is the same activity of mind" (*CLL* 2: 191). He believed it is the role of the poet to create for the reader (or viewer) a similar state of mind to that when dreaming:

> [...] in an interesting Play, read or represented, we are brought up to this point, as far as it is requisite or desirable gradually, by the Art of the Poet and the Actors, and with the consent and positive Aidance of our own Will (*CLL* 2: 266).

In the *Biographia Literaria*, published the previous year, Coleridge had likewise said, concerning the superiority of Shakespeare's male characters to fear of the invisible world:

> [...] it can bribe us into a voluntary submission of our better knowledge, into suspension of all our judgment derived from constant experience, and enable us to peruse with the liveliest interest the wildest tales of ghosts, wizards, genii, and secret talismans. On this propensity, so deeply rooted in our nature, a specific *dramatic* probability may be raised by a true poet, if the whole of his work be in harmony: a *dramatic* probability, sufficient for dramatic pleasure, even when the component characters and incidents border on impossibility. The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and our judgment *perdue* behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first

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[14] Perkins, "The Imaginative Vision of 'Kubla Khan'," 104.

> motion of our will: and meantime, only, not to *dis*believe (*CBL* 2: 217-18).

By emulating the state of illusion in dreaming, a "true poet" may, "if the whole of his work be in harmony" (*CLL* 2: 218), create in the reader a propensity to believe the improbable, to suspend his judgement, and to follow the poet into the waking dream experience of imaginative fiction.

Yet Coleridge also realized that poetry could not exactly emulate a dream, for to the waking mind dreams often seem absurd and irrational. While the reader does have a role, to "*chuse* to be deceived" (*CLL* 2: 266) and "not to *dis*believe" (*CBL* 2: 218), Coleridge recognized that it is only with well-written literature that the reader is able to do so. Comparing Klopstock with Milton, Coleridge says,

> The inferiority of Klopstock's Messiah is inexpressible. I admit the prerogative of poetic feeling, and poetic faith; but I cannot suspend the judgment even for a moment. A poem may in one sense be a dream, but it must be a waking dream (*CLL* 2: 425).

In great literature the reader's judgement is suspended just as it is in dreaming. However, since the will is not fully disabled when reading as it is in sleep, one may pass a judgement of disbelief when the illusion is not strong enough to create or to sustain the reader's dream-like state. Coleridge argues that while a highly imaginative dream-like landscape may be desirable in fiction and poetry, it must not "shock us like falsehoods" (*CLL* 2: 426). It cannot disturb the waking judgement.

One of the primary dream-like elements of "Kubla Khan" is its seemingly symbolic language. Many of the images in the poem appear to be interpretable, yet several of these can accommodate more than one possible interpretation. Although it

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[15] See for example *CLL* 1: 130-31 and 135; *CLL* 2: 266.

was written a full twenty years after "Kubla Khan," a notebook entry demonstrates Coleridge's notions of such an untranslatable but nevertheless communicative language:

> Language of Dreams. – The language of the Dream = Night is [contrary to] that of Waking = the Day. It is a language of Images and Sensations, the various dialects of which are far less different from each other, than the various <Day – > Language of Nations. Proved even by the Dream Books of different Countries & ages.
>
> 2. The images either direct, as when a Letter reminds me of itself, or symbolic – as Darkness for Calamity (*CNB* 3: 4409).

The language of dreams, according to Coleridge in 1818, is a form of communication, but one not entirely understood in waking. Communication is not through words, but through "Images and Sensations" (*CNB* 3: 4409). The images are at times read symbolically, and Coleridge notes that the dream interpretation books prove that the language of dreams is more universally recognized than the day-language of words. Although this observation was written much later than the poem, it comes only two years after any known copy of the preface, and it is possible that Coleridge had "Kubla Khan" in mind since he mentions "The Pains of Sleep" (which was published appended to "Kubla Khan") in the same notebook entry.

Additionally, from at least 1804 Coleridge believed that poetry communicates with its readers, not only through written language, but also through a common sympathy in generalizations. In a notebook entry Coleridge called "the attachment of the affections to *generalizations*" one of the "conditions of pleasure from poetry" (*CNB* 2: 2194), and in another entry that he rewrote in *Biographia Literaria* he

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[16] See for example *CLL* 1: 278-9 and *CLL* 2: 191. Cf: chapter one.

praised fifteenth and sixteenth-century poetry saying, "The imagery is almost always *general*, Sun, Moon, Flowers, Breezes, Murmuring Streams, warbling Songsters, delicious Shades, &c" (*CNB* 2: 2599). When one reads a description that is familiar, he may remember a time in his own past when he experienced something similar. That personal memory may in turn trigger emotions, both of nostalgia and as connected with the memory. Because the general image touches a personal chord in many readers, they will be more apt to sympathize with the poem. For example, a reader who has been to the Alps and has memories and emotions associated with them may sympathize with a character who experiences seeing them for the first time, but a reader who has not been there is less apt to feel much affinity. Yet with more familiar images, such as a warm summer's day, Coleridge believed that far more readers would sympathize.[17] In "Kubla Khan" Coleridge was evoking such sympathy in his readers through what is familiar and personal to all. He uses "*general*" imagery (*CNB* 2: 2599) – dome, river, caverns, sea, gardens, forests, fountain, etc. – as a system of communication. Most of the images are familiar to all readers, and many suggest interpretable symbols that may be commonly understood within and across some cultures, but that are not so directly allegorical as to suggest only one reading. "Kubla Khan" both invites and resists symbolic interpretation in the same way as do dreams.

The wide variety of critical readings is testimony to "Kubla Khan's" dream-like language. Several of the images in the poem suggest certain interpretations, but rarely is there only one possibility. The Khan, for example, may be focused on as a figure of authority – a Napoleon – or instead as the man who "ordered letters to be invented for his people" (*CNB* 1: 1281), civilizing yet destroying the primal. The

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[17] Coleridge also praised Shakespeare for the way he evokes sympathy through general images. See, for example, *CNB* 2: 2086; *CNB* 4: 4714; *CLL* 1: 253; *CLL* 1: 308; *CLL* 2: 148-49; *CBL* 2: 26-28. See also Jack Stillinger, "Keats and Coleridge," *Coleridge, Keats and the Imagination: Romanticism and*

fountain that bursts forth from beneath the earth readily suggests, in the context of the poem, the act of creating when the conscious poet changes ideas in the mind into words on the page, and inspiration when unconscious ideas become conscious, but can also suggest ejaculation, as Norman Fruman points out,[18] or laboured birth, as Kathleen Wheeler argues.[19] Likewise, the landscape may be sexualized, as in the readings of Gilbert and Gubar,[20] or psychologized as in that of M. W. Rowe.[21] It is not unusual that some critics, such as Eli Marcovitz,[22] give psychoanalytical readings while many others focus on a history and politics that the poem appears to subsume; critical interpretation varies widely in most literature. However, the elusive nature of "Kubla Khan's" dream-like language makes the poem particularly susceptible. Few Romantic poems could viably hold interpretations as diverse as Nigel Leask's reading in terms of Chinese theories of gardening,[23] Patricia Adair's parallels with myths of the underworld,[24] Alan Richardson's reading in terms of contemporary brain science,[25] David Vallins's relating the poem to theories of genius,[26] John Beer's focus on creativity[27] and David Perkins and Paul Magnuson's emphasis on the loss of the

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Adam's Dream, ed. J. Robert Barth, S.J. and John L. Mahoney (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1990) 25. Cf: Hazlitt on a similar issue in *Hz* 2: 26.

[18] Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel*, 397-98.

[19] Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry*, 33.

[20] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Mirror and the Vamp: Reflections on Feminist Criticism," *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989) as cited in Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 18.

[21] Rowe, "'Kubla Khan' and the Structure of the Psyche."

[22] Marcovitz, "Bemoaning the Lost Dream."

[23] Nigel Leask, "'Kubla Khan' and Orientalism: The Road to Xanadu Revisited," *Romanticism* 4.1 (1998). See also Kathleen M. Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theories," *Coleridge, Keats and Shelley*, ed. Peter J. Kitson, New Casebooks (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996).

[24] Adair, *The Waking Dream.*

[25] Richardson "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 18.

[26] David Vallins, *Coleridge and the Psychology of Romanticism: Feeling and Thought* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000). Kathleen Wheeler also discusses genius in Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theories."

[27] J. B. Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1977) 118. See also Michael O'Neill, "'That Dome in Air': Coleridge and the Self-Conscious Poem," *Romanticism* 1.2 (1995): 267; Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge*, Masters of World Literature (New York: Collier, 1973) 78; Irene H. Chayes, "'Kubla Khan' and the Creative Process," *Studies in Romanticism* 6.1 (1966); Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry*, to name but a few.

power of creativity.[28] Certain readings are preferable when the other images of the poem are interpreted, but by creating a system of communication based on multi-interpretable, generalized images, Coleridge specifically invites the variation. He has emulated a dream's seemingly symbolic language of images.

Critics also often discuss Coleridge's ideas on the waking dream in relation to stage illusion. Coleridge developed a theory relating the two over several years, primarily between 1808 and 1819. In his lectures and *Biographia Literaria* he says that viewers of drama experience neither "perfect Delusion" (*CLL* 2: 265), as the French critics had claimed, nor "[t]he opposite, supported by Dr Johnson" (*CLL* 2: 265). Coleridge argues that it is rather a drama's "Illusion" (*CLL* 2: 266) to which the audience voluntarily submits. The theory culminates with his claim in the *Biographia Literaria* that viewers exercise a "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" (*CBL* 2: 6).

There is great critical debate concerning the sources of Coleridge's theory, part of which includes attributing a source for the "waking dream." In 1927 Dorothy I. Morrill claimed that while the relationship of stage illusion to dreams came from Herder, the idea that it is "a *waking* dream to which we *voluntarily* submit ourselves" was A. W. Schlegel's. While Morrill admits that Lord Kames had used the term in 1761 "with reference to theatrical representations," she finds it "more than probable that Coleridge had the Germans in mind in this case."[29] T. M. Raysor thought Schlegel was the "obvious source,"[30] as have many other critics, and Max Schulz agrees that "the phrase ['waking dream'] is August Wilhelm Schlegel's."[31] In 1953

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[28] Perkins, "The Imaginative Vision of 'Kubla Khan';" Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*.
[29] Dorothy I. Morrill, "Coleridge's Theory of Dramatic Illusion," *Modern Language Notes* 42 (1927): 441, 441 n13; Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 11th ed. (London: Blake, 1839).
[30] Qtd. in Foakes, editor's introduction, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, 1: lv.
[31] Max F. Schulz, *The Poetic Voices of Coleridge: A Study of his Desire for Spontaneity and Passion for Order* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1963) 125.

Elisabeth Schneider argued that whereas with Schlegel "questions of precedence and indebtedness have not been answered beyond the possibility of doubt [...], [m]ost of what Coleridge was to say [Erasmus] Darwin had already said." With these borrowings she includes Darwin's idea of the "theatric reverie."[32] R. A. Foakes argues that Darwin had turned to Kames but adds that "the image of the 'waking dream' is echoed by Darwin, Herder, Schlegel, and Coleridge." He believes that "Where so many writers [...] begin to relate stage-illusion to dreams, it might almost be said that such ideas were in the air [...]."[33] Frederick Burwick also recognizes that "Reference to the 'waking dream' is such a commonplace in eighteenth-century criticism that we can scarcely exclude any of the major accounts of aesthetic illusion: Diderot and Rousseau in France; Lessing, Nicolai, and Mendelssohn in Germany."[34]

Foakes and Burwick are perceptive to see the term and the idea being used in various ways by many writers. The waking dream for Coleridge, and later for others such as Lamb and Hazlitt, described the imaginative state of all who experience fiction and included ideas on poetry as a waking dream. [35] Although Coleridge's theories most certainly evolved over his long lifetime, he was from early years musing on the relationship of poetry and dream states. The waking dream state is evident in *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, though in these poems it is a character who experiences the state of mind. In the former poem, the Mariner experiences a waking

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[32] Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1953) 96, 103.
[33] Foakes, editor's introduction, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, vol. 1, lvii.
[34] Frederick Burwick, "On Stage Illusion: From Wordsworth's Marginalia to Coleridge's Lectures," *The Wordsworth Circle* 19.1 (1988) 30. For more on Coleridge, stage illusion and the waking dream, and related subjects, see Patricia M. Ball, "The Waking Dream: Coleridge and the Drama," *The Morality of Art: Essays Presented to G. Wilson Knight by his Colleagues and Friends* (London: Routledge, 1969) 165-74; Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986) 128-32; David W. Ullrich, "Distinctions in Poetic and Intellectual Influence: Coleridge's Use of Erasmus Darwin" *The Wordsworth Circle* 15.2 (1984) 74-80; J. R. de J. Jackson, "Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion and Spectacle in the Performance of Shakespeare's Plays," *Modern Philology* 62 (1964-65): 13-21; G. N. G. Orsini, "Coleridge and Schlegel Reconsidered," *Comparative Literature* 16 (1964) 97-118.

nightmare in which he cannot discern living actions from delirious visions. As "The Night-mare Life-in-Death" (1.1: 193) forces him to relive the experiences (1.1: 582-85), his memories become his life and he must live in a waking dream, or nightmare, world. The wedding guest also experiences a waking dream as he is mesmerized by the Mariner (1.1: 13-16) and lives through the nightmare as the tale is told. In the latter poem, Christabel wakes into a nightmare after sleeping in the arms of Geraldine, who, like the Mariner, has mesmerized her victim (1.1: 267, 292-301). "Kubla Khan" is different in that, whereas the reader experiences the waking dream second-hand through the experience of the dreaming characters in *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, the experience is now much closer. The near-absence of a dreaming character, who only makes himself known during moments of reflection (in the form of the "I" of line 38 and the Author of the Preface), causes the reader to feel first-hand the experience of the waking dream.

In order to create such a waking dream state for the reader of "Kubla Khan," Coleridge initially leads the reader into the poem's simulated dream experience with the hypnotic rhythm of the verse. The first four lines imitate the rhythm of a swinging pendulum or ticking of a clock as they entrance and lull the reader with their four stresses:

> In **Xa** na **du** did **KU** BLA **KHA** N
>
> A **sta** tely **plea** sure-**dome** de **cree:**
>
> Where **ALPH**, the **sac** red **riv** er, **ran**
>
> Through **cav** erns **meas** ure **less** to **man** [...] (1-4; my emphasis and spacing).

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[35] See chapter one for the views of Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt and other Romantic writers on poetry and the waking dream.

Coleridge was fascinated by the states of mind between those of sleeping and waking. During the time that "Kubla Khan" was written, he was intrigued by mesmerism and the magnetic sleep in which conscious volition was said to be suspended.[36] John Beer sees "discreet hints of natural magnetism in *The Nightingale* and the overt presentation of hypnotic powers in the original *Ancient Mariner* and Part One of *Christabel*" as well as an involvement with the phenomenon in *The Three Graves* but overlooks the hypnotic rhythm of "Kubla Khan."[37] Frederick Burwick very surprisingly also overlooks "Kubla Khan" in an article entitled "Coleridge, Schlegel and Animal Magnetism" that looks closely at *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, and also sees "evidence of magnetic influence in such poems as 'The Eolian Harp,' 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison,' 'Frost at Midnight' [and] 'Dejection: An Ode.'"[38] Yet "Kubla Khan" was written in the same period as *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* and all three are significantly involved with dream states. Coleridge would have recognized in the magnetic sleep similarities with the waking dream state he wished to create for his readers. He would have also seen similarities with the state of mind produced by opium, the medical term for which was "hypnotic" as deriving from the Greek *hupnotikos* meaning "narcotic, causing sleep."[39] If "Kubla Khan" was an attempt to produce or reproduce an opium-related dream in a poem, it is evident that he would have sought to induce a type of hypnotic state with the use of poetic techniques.

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[36] Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 220; and Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 101, 103. Although Coleridge did not readily subscribe to the doctrine of mesmerism and was at times sceptical, his interest is undeniable as it pervades his notebooks and other works for at least thirty-five years (1795 to 1830).
[37] Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 220.
[38] Frederick Burwick, "Coleridge, Schlegel, and Animal Magnetism," *English and German Romanticism: Cross-Currents and Controversies*, ed. James Pipkin, Reihe Siegen, Beiträge zur Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft Band 44 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1985) 279.
[39] "Hypnotic," *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2001 ed. Cf: "Hypnotic," *Oxford English Dictionary*.

As I have discussed in chapter one, Spenser was known to many of the Romantics as "the poet of our waking dreams" (*Hz* 2: 205). The pure fantasy he created in *The Faerie Queene* was the ideal waking dream experience – a poem to emulate as one that achieves the highest degree of imaginative fiction possible in poetry. Coleridge recognized the advantage of the position in which Spenser placed his readers. He has been quoted as saying,

> The poet has placed you in a dream, a charmed sleep, and you neither wish, nor have the power, to inquire where you are, or how you got there. [40]

By creating a hypnotic rhythm, especially in the initial lines of "Kubla Khan," Coleridge was leading readers into the same "charmed sleep" or waking dream experience in which is suspended disbelief.

As the rhythm charms the reader so too does the mythic quality of the poem. Xanadu and the Khan are both historical, yet legendary. They have an exotic quality about them and are so far beyond memorable history as to seem mythical. They create an atmosphere of historical romance, giving the reader a point of reference before he is led further into the waking dreamland that is created by romance.

The poem tells of a "stately pleasure-dome decree[d]" (2) by "Kubla Khan" (1) in the midst of a landscape at once seen and unseen. Allegorically it is the incarnation of a perfect and ideal vision standing majestically and firmly in the landscape of the mind and all of its known and unknown workings. The "sacred river" (3) that flows through all, connecting and bringing sustenance to the landscape represents the source of ideas and inspiration that allow the Khan to create. The landscape above ground, "fertile" (6) and "bright" (8), seems to have a visible

perimeter in the form of the "walls and towers" (7) that "were girdled round" (7), but though the walls encompass the garden on the sides, below the ground the caverns stretch "measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea" (4-5), to profound depths unknown, unseen, and impossible to contain.

The hypnotic rhythm of the verse continues, but with a more varied metre, moving between lines of three to six feet, to create a heightened dream effect and appear truer to nature – to the supposed transcription of a real dream – than would a more structured metre and form. In an article entitled "Coleridge, Mary Robinson, and the Prosody of Dreams," Daniel Robinson writes effectively on the "dream world"[41] that Coleridge creates through his versification. Robinson says that the "commentary on *The Faerie Queene*" (part of which is quoted above) "suggests that Coleridge himself may have devised a prosody of dreams to achieve a similar effect."[42] Robinson rightly goes on to argue that in seeking to create what Coleridge saw as Spenser's dream effect, Coleridge "would need to subvert metrical conventions and, like Spenser, invent a poetic form that is distinctly his own."[43] The varying verse appears to the reader to be less consciously constructed and more believably a product of the unconscious. The rhythm flows smoothly so as not to disturb the reader from the waking dream in which Coleridge wished to place him. Had the rhythm been too regular or equally too irregular, the result may have been noticeably conscious or jarring and would have dissolved the dream effect. Coleridge often noted the lack of surprise felt in sleeping dreams. Nothing in the rhythm of the poem, he realized, could surprise the reader or the hypnotic effect would be lost.

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[40] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable, 1936) 36.
[41] Daniel Robinson, "Coleridge, Mary Robinson, and the Prosody of Dreams," *Dreaming: Journal of the Association for the Study of Dreams* 7.2 (1997): 121.
[42] Robinson, "Coleridge, Mary Robinson, and the Prosody of Dreams," 126.
[43] Robinson, "Coleridge, Mary Robinson, and the Prosody of Dreams," 126.

The prosody of "Kubla Khan" revolves around complicated sound patterns, giving the poem an almost musical impression when read aloud. Lamb said that Coleridge "repeats ["Kubla Khan"] so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven & Elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it."[44] The mesmerizing nature of "Kubla Khan" is enhanced when it is read aloud. Coleridge recognized the advantages for reciting the poem to friends rather than publishing it for the world to examine. With recitation he could use the tone of his voice to lull the listener into a spellbound waking-dream state. In relation to the publishing of *Christabel* Coleridge wrote of the

> excitement and temporary sympathy of feeling, which the recitation of the poem by an admirer [...] calls forth in the audience. For this is really a species of Animal Magnetism, in which the enkindling Reciter, by perpetual comment of looks and tones, lends his own will and apprehensive faculty to his Auditors. They *live* for the time within the dilated sphere of his intellectual Being (*CBL* 2: 239-40).

The mesmeric effects of a recited poem cause sympathy in the audience who "*live*" (*CBL* 2: 240) in the dream. It is the same "charmed sleep"[45] that Coleridge believed Spenser to evoke in readers. Coleridge did not deny that the same was possible in a poem when read, but he recognized the possibility "that a reader left to himself should sink below the poem" (*CBL* 2: 240) or vice versa, whereas the reciter can enrich the mesmeric effects.

The historical and exotic but natural romance of the first section slides deeper into the waking dream as it moves into a more supernatural, gothic romance. The

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[44] Lamb, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, 2: 190.
[45] Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, 36.

"deep romantic chasm" (12) covered by cedars – ancient trees[46] – is "A savage place" (14), wild and sublime. The description of the chasm invokes the imagery of romance: not only is it "inchanted" (14), it is "holy" (14), not in the traditional sense, but in the way in which Romantic romance depicts a dark, superstitious and eerie side to religion, particularly Catholicism. The place is only as holy as one "haunted" (15) by the archetypal Eve-like "woman [not *a* woman] wailing for her demon-lover" (16), by the dim light of "a waning moon" (15). The supernatural imagery of the figure who haunts and the demon she loves is balanced by its parallel in the Biblical figures of Eve and Satan. While the "woman" (16) and "demon-lover" (16) give the Biblical figures a supernatural and mythical quality, their Eve and Satan counterparts give them a familiar, quasi-historical balance. Having evoked the dream of romance with the exotic legend of Kubla Khan and Xanadu, Coleridge leads the reader further into the "charmed sleep"[47] with the more supernatural imagery of gothic romance.

While there is motion in the first eleven lines with the flowing of the "sacred river" (3) "Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea" (4-5), the movement is smooth and fluid. At line twelve the pace increases and the motion turns to turbulence as the chasm slants "athwart" its "cedarn cover," (13) as "woman" wails (16), and as the pressure of the river and chasm builds to a climax and erupts with volcanic force. The imagery is of generation[48] and is representative of creative energy and inspiration in the birth of ideas, as the sacred river explodes in one climactic moment of creativity:

> And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
>
> As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
>
> A mighty fountain momently was forced:

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[46] "Cedar," *The New Oxford Dictionary of English.*

Amid whose swift half-intermitted Burst

Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,

Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:

And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever

It flung up momently the sacred river (17-24).

As the fountain of inspiration bursts forth from below, the sacred river flows from the cavern like lava. Down through the garden, "Through wood and dale the sacred river ran" (26) in all directions, "meandering with a mazy motion" (25) then back down through the "caverns measureless to man" (27) it "sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean" (28). What the river touched along the way is inevitably fertilized and will provide the materials for creation.

Lines 29 and 30 mark a dramatic turning point in the poem. Kubla, who had decreed the original, ideal vision "heard from far / Ancestral voices prophesying war!" (29-30), as the creativity threatens to shatter the ideal. As discussed in chapter one, Lamb believed the ideal truly and firmly exists in the mind as something that can be lost. Of watching a stage production of Hamlet he says, "We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance" (*LW* 1: 98). When the fountain of inspiration brings ideas to the surface and the poet begins to transform the vision into a poem, the "dream" is inevitably lost.

The vision has been transformed into a "shadow" (31), which recalls Plato's cave. It is only a shadow of the ideal that had existed in the garden. Yet, while it only floats "midway on the waves" (32), it is surrounded by the "mingled measure / From the fountain and the caves" (34), so that those who see the shadow hear music from the sacred river – strains of inspired and profound ideas from the imagination. It

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[47] Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, 36.

is not the same as the original vision, but it is nevertheless "a miracle of rare device, / A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" (35-36). The vision has been transformed and although it is only a shadow of the mind's original, the new creation reconciles the oppositions. It is a miracle; a realized dream. While the beginning of Lamb's statement – "We have let go a dream" (*LW* 1: 98) – may apply, the end cannot because the poem *is* an attainable substance, different from the original vision, but valuable. As John Beer says, "*Kubla Khan*, the poem, does exist; and it has value."[49]

There are sixteen, primarily scenic, transitions in the poem as the reader is led from one place to the next.[50] The reader imagines first Xanadu where there is a pleasure-dome and a river (1-3), then measureless caverns (4), followed by a sunless sea (5). From there he is led back above-ground to the fertile ground, gardens, and rills girdled by walls and towers (6-9), then to ancient forests (10), and further to a chasm slanting down a green hill (11-12), and on throughout the poem. Coleridge emulates the movement of sleeping dreams as one image flows smoothly into another. The same can be said of "Kubla Khan" as Lamb says of *The Faerie Queene*: it has

> the shifting mutations of the most rambling dream, [even while] our judgment [is] yet all the time awake, and neither able nor willing to detect the fallacy, – [it] is a proof of that hidden sanity which still guides the poet in his widest seeming-aberrations (*LW* 2: 189).

As with Spenser, the transitions are in harmony with the waking judgement and do not disturb the waking dream.

The transition at line 37 creates the effect on the reader of one dream leading into another quite different dream. This is not to say that these are two dreams of the "Author" or "I" of the poem; it is rather the effect on the reader to which I am

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[48] I have borrowed the word from Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*, 44.

referring, as Coleridge copies for him the experience of the dream. The light, dancing verse coupled with the very different scene of "A damsel with a dulcimer" (37) cause the reader to feel as if the initial dream has dissolved and a second dream appeared. The transition is substantial and impossible not to notice, yet remarkably the reader is not surprised enough to lose the dream-like effect. The poem retains its charmed hold and keeps the reader "in the Land of Faery – i.e. in mental space" (*CLL* 2: 409-10). Yet it is evident that it is a different dream than before. The first part of the poem begins to feel more like a dream within a dream, where line 37 marks the first level of waking; or rather a memory, which is a similarly imaginative state to dreaming. It is a shift that takes the reader out of the charmed hold of the first section, but one that takes him immediately into another.

For the first time in the poem a viewer of the vision is introduced, though it is a different vision of which he speaks:

> A damsel with a dulcimer
>
> In a vision once I saw:
>
> It was an Abyssinian maid
>
> And on her dulcimer she play'd,
>
> Singing of Mount Abora (37-41).

The "I" longs to experience it again:

> Could I revive within me
>
> Her symphony and song
>
> To such a deep delight 'twould win me [...] (42-44).

He wishes to "revive" (42) her music within him, to remember and to recreate that inspired state.

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[49] Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 118.

The light, playful rhyme of the lines on the damsel become longer and heavier as the poem recalls the description of Xanadu and the vision of the pleasure-dome, serving to take the reader back to a more deeply charmed level of the waking dream. Where lines 37-42 hover between 3 and 4 feet, refusing to be pinned down, the verse slows significantly with the 5 feet of line 44, and with the long, heavy stresses of the "o" and "u" sounds in line 45 with "That with mūsic lōūd and lōng." Just as sleep follows the deep sleep – REM – deep sleep cycle, so does the poem reflect differing levels of the depths of dreaming. While Coleridge could not have known of this cyclical phenomenon, he was intensely interested in the different levels of reverie, waking dream, trance or magnetic sleep, nightmare (in which he believed that one is between sleeping and waking[51]) and sleep, and it is likely that the different levels created for the reader by Coleridge are intentional, to emphasize the profound depths of the purely imaginative pleasure-dome and caverns.

Longing for the lost vision the "I" (38) is confident that if only he could "revive within me / Her symphony and song" (42-43), he could create in poetry a vision of that creation:

> [...] with music loud and long,
>
> I would build that dome in air,
>
> That sunny dome! those caves of ice! (45-47)

He believes that "all who heard" (48) would see the vision itself and the imagination from which it was built. Longing turns to frenzied dream as he envisions himself in the role of, and acclaimed as, poet possessed by inspiration:

> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
>
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

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[50] I place the sixteen transitions at lines 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 17, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 37, 42, and 48.

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread:

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drank the milk of Paradise (49-54).

Although he begins by describing a longed-for state, as Michael O'Neill points out, "Coleridge slip[s] the leash of the conditional mood,"[52] and by the end the poet has fed "on honey-dew [...] / And drank the milk of Paradise" (53-54). The "I" has assumed the role of poet.[53] The increase in the pace of these lines recalls the original climax of lines 17-24, but this is a creative process in which the poet has a role. Where the inspired ideas originally rushed to the surface, he must now work to build up this second realization. He has lost the vision, but gained a poem created through human will. In a poem concerned with the loss of creative inspiration, the paradox is that through that loss Coleridge has created, for "Kubla Khan" has been written.

The waking dream experience that Coleridge created for the reader of "Kubla Khan" presents a highly imaginative literary space befitting a poem that reveals as it represents the processes of the imagination in creativity. It is "a poem about itself"[54] in many ways. It describes the realization of an Author's dream in poetry and is itself the realization of Coleridge's dream, by which I refer to his idea of the poem as well as the supposed opium dream. The preface, as fictionalized dream-framing device creates a balance in that it parallels Coleridge's own composition of the poem as referred to in the postscript of the Crewe manuscript. The preface depicts an inspired poet who experiences a dream from which he writes a poem that depicts an inspired poet who has seen a vision, all of which was written by a poet, namely Coleridge.

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[51] See for example *CLL* 1: 135-36 and *CNB* 3: 4046.
[52] O'Neill, "'That Dome in Air'," 267.
[53] Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*, 49.
[54] Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 118.

Additionally, the waking dream is a parallel experience that also reveals the creative process. The music of the damsel – the muse that represents the imagination from which pours forth the inspired strains – reveals to the poet the workings of the imagination in the creative process. She sings of Mount Abora, not of Kubla Khan, the pleasure dome, gardens or fountain, but because the creative process happens when she sings, he comes to see that process because of her. It is not Mount Abora he has seen in a vision, but the damsel herself. He wishes to revive her symphony and song, not so that he can finish a very short fragment of a poem on Mount Abora, but so that he can again take part in the creative act and through it come to understand more fully the processes of the imagination in creativity. Coleridge has presented "Kubla Khan" as a dream poem so that the reader can also take part in the creative process. By placing the reader in a waking dream state, he is giving the reader the opportunity to see the creative process likewise revealed. Coleridge becomes for the reader, the damsel. His symphony and song – the poem of "Kubla Khan" – enable the reader to understand the process for himself as it happens to him. As the reader imagines the gardens, fountain, caves, and the damsel, those images are created in his mind and he can experience first-hand personal emotions being evoked by the generalized images. It is primarily through this reader involvement in the waking-dream experience that the poem reveals its representation of the creative process.

To Coleridge, dreaming was a unique phenomenon in the way it allowed one to view the workings of the imagination as unaffected by reason and human will. He considered dreams to be purely imaginative fictions that speak in a language of seemingly symbolic images, which may be commonly interpreted within and across some cultures and may evoke a common sympathy through familiarity and personal experience. In writing a dream poem, Coleridge recognized the freedom it allowed

for heightened creativity, because as Lamb says, "There is no [...] canon by which a dream may be criticised" (*LW* 2: 65). Coleridge could experiment with prosody and feel no need to explain it as he did with *Christabel* (1.1: 482-83). He recognized the opportunity that dream poetry afforded in experimenting with and representing the workings of the imagination in creativity. It was also, he realized, a form in which to explore the relationship between dreams and poetry. Dreams were a model for the poet as achieving the ideal state of poetic illusion when the dreamer puts full faith in the drama, never questioning and never surprised. It was a state of illusion for a poet to emulate though with consideration for the reader's waking judgement. Coleridge recognized that by placing the reader in a waking dream experience in "Kubla Khan," he could achieve a highly imaginative, highly poetic literary space that appeals intellectually and emotionally through both the language and the prosody of dreams, that reveals as it represents the imagination in the creative process, and that achieves the aim of a true poet: a state of poetic illusion differing only in degree from dreaming.

Chapter Four

Wordsworth: "The Dream of the Arab"

The episode in book five of *The Prelude* known as "The Dream of the Arab" stands out as one of the poem's pivotal moments, though in a different manner than the episodes of "The Simplon Pass" and "Mount Snowdon." It shares some characteristics with the "spots of time," having, like memories, its own imaginative time and space; however it stands out as different even from these. Where the rest of *The Prelude* is concerned with common people and the beauty of the nature surrounding Wordsworth that many take for granted, "The Dream of the Arab" is exotic and centers upon a figure both of romance – a "semi-Quixote" (5: 142) – and of orientalism – "an arab of the Bedouin tribes" (5: 78). Where the rest focuses on the power of the waking imagination and its connection with nature, this passage focuses on an imaginative dream and its connection with books and the tales of romance. It differs from the rest of *The Prelude* because it is Wordsworth's example of romance, his example of the highly imaginative fiction that he praises in book five. Through the "Dream of the Arab" passage, Wordsworth explores the relationship between dream and romance as he demonstrates how such highly imaginative fiction both teaches and delights.

The passage seems so unusual for Wordsworth, so unique in *The Prelude* that nearly all critics make reference to possible outside sources. Many wishing to view the passage as the record of a true dream forget to recognize the reason for the romance content – that it is an example of the topic of book five – or that the rhythm, diction, themes and slow, thoughtful pace insist that even if it was based on a dream

experience, it is not simply the record of a dream, but Wordsworth's own poetry and quintessentially a part of *The Prelude*.

Critical debate on "The Dream of the Arab" tends largely to rest on a contextual background proposed by Jane Worthington Smyser in 1956.[1] At the time many critics used the 1850 version of the poem in which Wordsworth claims that he had dreamt the sequence recorded as "The Dream of the Arab" passage, and it was Smyser's objective to point out that many were overlooking the fact that in the 1805 version he says it was dreamt by a friend. Smyser then went on to point out a similarity between Wordsworth's passage and a series of dreams apparently dreamt and recorded by Descartes, though subsequently lost, and mentioned by Adrien Baillet and Leibnitz. Smyser suggested the final Descartes dream as a possible source, and then suggested Michel Beaupuy as possibly having related it to Wordsworth since Wordsworth is not known to have read it himself. Beaupuy is, she suggests, the "friend" (5: 49) of the 1805 version. Here she readily admits that her suggestion is "nothing more than a conjecture."[2] Smyser rejects Coleridge as a probable intermediary on the grounds that the friend is referred to in the third person whereas "in *The Prelude* Wordsworth would never have used the third person in speaking of Coleridge; the poem was written for Coleridge and throughout he is intimately addressed in the second person."[3]

Yet Smyser's conjecture that the friend should be Beaupuy rests only on the fact that he was philosophically inclined and might have known of Descartes' dream. Smyser presents her suggestions only as possibilities and they rest on very shaky

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[1] Jane Worthington Smyser, "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science: *The Prelude*, V," *PMLA* 71.1 (1956): 269-75.
[2] Smyser, "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science," 272.
[3] Smyser, "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science," 272.

ground. There is no concrete evidence that Beaupuy knew or told Descartes' dream to Wordsworth. Indeed, the dream, or at least what is known of it, is not really very similar to Wordsworth's passage at all, except that it involves two books, one of which is poetry, the other a dictionary symbolizing, so Descartes thought, all knowledge.[4] The dream has nothing of the exotic quality, the power and emotion, nor the apocalyptic threat of "The Dream of the Arab." It takes place in Descartes' own room (likely a study or bedroom), the books appear, in the shape of books, on a table, and Descartes opens the book of poetry to a poem entitled "Quod vitae sectabor iter?" then searches for another called "Est & Non" to show a man who had also appeared. He cannot find the poem and the man and books disappear. Then Descartes, apparently before waking, interprets the dream and decides that philosophy (which he sees as conjoined with poetry) is his calling in life.[5] Descartes' dream, which shares none of Wordsworth's imagery or symbolism, except the idea of two books, does not even suggest the subject of mortality or anxiety for the endurance of man's achievements and books of great wisdom. With no Arab or Quixote, no desert or dromedary, no threat of deluge, no stone or shell, and no crazed mission to save the books from destruction, it is difficult to see much similarity in the two dream passages at all. Despite this, however, most critics since 1956 have accepted as fact that the source of the passage is Descartes and that either Coleridge or Beaupuy is the friend who related it to Wordsworth. Smyser's conjecture has become a now common assumption.

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[4] See Adrien Baillet, *La Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes*, 2 vols., 1691, facsimile rpt. (New York: Garland, 1987) 1: 182-84 as quoted and cited in Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 184-205. See the appendix to Philmus for an English translation of Baillet on the third of Descartes' dreams.

[5] See the appendix to Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 184-205.

A few other critics have noticed that Smyser's suggestion is far from certain and have proposed other sources. Theresa M. Kelley suggests several, including the account of the deluge in Josephus's *A History of the Jews*, and the deluges of Genesis, *The Metamorphoses*, and *Paradise Lost*.[6] Michael Ragussis argues for *The Metamorphoses* and Plato's *Timeus*.[7] Graeme Stones makes a case for James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*,[8] while Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch suggests Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* and C. F. Volney's *Travels through Egypt and Syria*, among others.[9] David Chandler also argues for Burnet, and believes that Southey was the friend that related it to Wordsworth.[10] While there are others that could be added to this list, by far the majority commonly accept as fact that Descartes is the source. Douglas B. Wilson, J. Hillis Miller, Gordon K. Thomas, Glenn W. Most, Mary Jacobus, Henry Weinfield, Timothy Bahti, and Jonathan Wordsworth are all among those who accept as fact without giving any evidence that Wordsworth's source is Descartes' dream.[11] While it is possible that Wordsworth

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[6] Theresa M. Kelley, "Spirit and Geometric Form: The Stone and the Shell in Wordsworth's Arab Dream," *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982): 563-82; and Theresa M. Kelley, "Deluge and Buried Treasure in Wordsworth's Arab Dream," *Notes and Queries* 225 (1980): 70-71.

[7] Michael Ragussis, "Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream," *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975): 148-65.

[8] Graeme Stones, "'Upon a dromedary mounted high,'" *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 104 (1998): 145-58. The full title of Bruce's *Travels* is cited in Stones as *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, 5 vols., Edinburgh, 1790.

[9] Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, "The Stone and the Shell: Wordsworth, Cataclysm, and the Myth of Glaucus," *Studies in Romanticism* 24 (1985): 455-90.

[10] David Chandler, "Robert Southey and *The Prelude*'s 'Arab Dream,'" *The Review of English Studies* 54 (2003): 203-19.

[11] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream*; J. Hillis Miller, "The Stone and the Shell: The Problem of Poetic Form in Wordsworth's Dream of the Arab," *Mouvements Premiers: Études Critiques Offertes à Georges Poulet*, ed. Georges Poulet (Paris: José Corti, 1972): 125-47; Gordon K. Thomas, "Fact and Fiction, Stone and Shell: Wordsworth's Dream of the Poetic Paradox," *Neophilologus* 74.2 (1990): 310-17; Glenn W. Most, "Wordsworth's 'Dream of the Arab' and Cervantes," *English Language Notes* 22.3 (1985): 52-58; Mary Jacobus, "Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream," *ELH* 46.4 (1979): 618-44; Henry Weinfield, "'Knowledge Not Purchased by the Loss of Power': Wordsworth's Meditation on Books and Death in Book 5 of *The Prelude*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43.3 (2001): 334-363; Timothy Bahti, "Figures of Interpretation, The Interpretation of Figures: A Reading of Wordsworth's 'Dream of the Arab,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (1979): 601-27; Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill, ed., *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, by William Wordsworth (New York: Norton, 1979);

was somehow influenced by Descartes' dream and that a friend related it to him, there is no concrete evidence and it should not, therefore, be assumed as fact.

There are also critical problems concerning the friend. Those who have read Smyser's brief argument against Coleridge often follow her in suggesting Beaupuy. Yet many, without evidence, and often mistakenly quoting Smyser, assume the friend to be Coleridge.[12] Smyser is right to point out the use of the third person, and yet there is something very Coleridgean about the piece that insists it is in some way connected with him – if not from him as a source, then certainly influenced by his dream poetry or written with him in mind. The dream frame is similar to that of "Kubla Khan," and Coleridge's insistence on the lack of surprise in sleep – a "perfect faith in all that passed" (5: 114), which is the very basis of the suspension of disbelief – is clearly delineated. Indeed it is very easy and entertaining to imagine Coleridge telling Wordsworth and embellishing what he had read of Descartes' dream, even perhaps forgetting to mention that it was not his own. Yet again, whether or not the tale was told or the dream was dreamt by Coleridge, Beaupuy, Southey or Wordsworth is a matter of speculation, just as is any source for the dream sequence, and this chapter does not, as most critical works do, build upon the assumption that, as Douglas B. Wilson confidently states, "Wordsworth's dream derives from an actual dream by Descartes."[13]

Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 194.

[12] Many critics assume the friend is Coleridge, but give Smyser as their evidence, suggesting that they have not read Smyser, let alone found proof that it should be Coleridge. Wordsworth, Abrams and Gill, ed., *The Prelude,* 158n is a prime example of this. The note reads: "The dream of the Arab and his two "books," ascribed to a friend in 1805 and to Wordsworth himself in 1850, is *in fact* a brilliantly imaginative transformation of a dream experienced by the philosopher Descartes in 1619. It had presumably been related to Wordsworth by Coleridge; see Jane Worthington Smyser, "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science," *PMLA*, LXXI (1956), pp. 269-75" (my emphasis).

[13] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 173.

Wilson's *The Romantic Dream: Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious* is of great concern to this thesis, as one of the few full-length works devoted to the study of dream in Romantic poetry. Yet the very foundations upon which the study rests are questionable at best.[14] In relation to "The Dream of the Arab" Wilson, along with J. Hillis Miller and Timothy Bahti whom he criticizes, assumes that Wordsworth's passage extends from Descartes' dream. He then argues against Miller for saying that "it is not so much a real dream as the deliberate invention of a dream sequence"[15] and against Bahti who, he says, "downplaying the dream component, interprets the Arab dream as more like a literary text than a dream."[16] Wilson does not wish to see "The Dream of the Arab" wholly as a literary text because he would not feel as confident with his brand of psychoanalysis if it were not in some way considered a dream.

Yet believing that it comes from Descartes' dream, Wilson must claim some ownership for Wordsworth or his argument of "self-analysis" could not hold. In the end his self-justification must admit that Miller and Bahti are correct to an extent so that he can psychoanalyze the passage as Wordsworth's dream rather than that of Descartes:

> A dream by Wordsworth himself might have involved more personal repression and been less subject to the laws of grammar and waking expression. But constructed from another's actual dream, the Arab dream is nearer to an authentic dream than one fashioned out of airy nothing. Bahti's recognition of the unique quality of this dream sets

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[14] See my introduction for a commentary on Wilson's study as a whole. In this chapter I am primarily concerned with chapter six in Wilson's study, "Wordsworth's Self-Analysis: The Arab Dream."
[15] Miller, "The Stone and the Shell," 138. Miller is quoted in Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 172.
[16] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 173. Cf: Bahti, "Figures of Interpretation, The Interpretation of Figures," 601-27.

the stage for his own rhetorical reading, yet it also captures the burden of the reader's task. No literary dream, tailored to fit the contexts of fiction, will ever exactly correspond to the live act of dreaming. Wordsworth's nightmare of the Arab, however, meets all of the requirements necessary for a psychoanalytic reading of the text as an authorial dream.[17]

The very basis of this argument – that had it not come from an outside source it would somehow be "less subject to the laws of grammar and waking expression" – is very flawed. A dream is primarily a visual phenomenon that takes place in the sleeping mind and the very act of writing transforms whatever origin it might have had into a literary text. Indeed it is the very transformation that "Kubla Khan" takes as its subject. The act of putting a primarily visual phenomenon into writing necessarily makes it subject to the "laws of grammar," and since it is impossible to *write* good poetry whilst sleeping, it must also be subject to "waking expression." Therefore even if Wordsworth had dreamed something similar himself, it would not and could not have been as Wilson suggests. Wilson then argues that since, as he believes, the passage comes from a dream of Descartes', rather than from Wordsworth's own imagination (which can hardly be called, as Wilson says, "airy nothing"), it is "nearer to an authentic dream" so it is more appropriate for psychoanalysis. Wilson is forgetting the eighteenth-century dream theory that he discusses in his first chapter, particularly Hobbes, when he suggests that any creativity begins with "airy nothing," and is reductive towards the Romantic notion of the power of the imagination. The major Romantic poets and essayists, almost without exception, believed in a relationship between dreams and imaginative creativity in a waking state. Interest in

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[17] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 173.

dreams at the time often stems from this very notion. Wilson downplays Wordsworth's conscious poetic efforts in an attempt to emphasize the unconscious elements in the piece. Yet because he wishes to psychoanalyze Wordsworth and not Descartes, he, paradoxically, given the whole basis of his argument, finally concedes that "No literary dream, tailored to fit the contexts of fiction, will ever exactly correspond to the live act of dreaming," but then insists, without explaining what requirements it has met, that "Wordsworth's nightmare of the Arab, *however*, meets all of the requirements necessary for a psychoanalytic reading of the text as an authorial dream" (my emphasis).[18]

Robert M. Philmus provides another example of the many critics who, through psychoanalytical criticism, downplay the poet's conscious artistry. He too believes that "The Dream of the Arab" is "not a consciously manufactured vision but [rather] an 'authentic dream,'"[19] and argues his case on the grounds that the passage, "if reduced to prose, would not at all seem out of place in the pages of *Die Traumdeutung*."[20] Rather than accepting this as evidence of Wordsworth's success in emulating dreams in his dream poem, Philmus argues that Wordsworth had little consciousness of the meaning of the dream, and that he was in "deliberate" "psychological denial."[21] Philmus does not see the passage as inspired by Descartes or any other source, but does insist that "the nightmare Wordsworth recounts is his own" because

> the nightmare-account is so vivid, so powerful – even in its 1805 rendition, which does not have the vatic qualities of the 1850 text – as

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[18] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 173.
[19] Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 185.
[20] Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 186.
[21] Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 196.

> to make it virtually impossible to credit anyone else's stake in it without also supposing that Wordsworth empathetically experienced the nightmare himself.[22]

Philmus apparently believes that it is impossible for one of the greatest poets in the English language ever to write something "so vivid, so powerful" without having dreamt it with anxiety. He is dismissive of Wordsworth's ability to write dream poetry. Because of his refusal to examine "The Dream of the Arab" as the literary text, the consciously constructed poem, that it is, he misunderstands the point of the passage, concluding instead with misguided assertions such as his claim that "The psychological basis of the nightmare, then, is the death of Wordsworth's father emotionally apprehended as paternal rejection."[23] In rejecting the fact that "The Dream of the Arab" is a dream poem, not "an authentic dream,"[24] Philmus, like Wilson, denies the poet's successful artistry and gives a misguided reading of the poem.

I do not disagree with psychoanalysis as a critical approach to literature in general. Rather, my contention is that many critics such as Wilson and Philmus apply psychoanalysis especially to dream poetry because they believe dream poetry is somehow less of a literary text than other forms of poetry, that it is somehow a window to the unconscious of the poet. No doubt the Romantics would have liked them to think so. However dream poetry is a literary form in which poets employ specific techniques designed to emulate the phenomenon of dreams. These techniques (which, I would add, are not always the same but which have the same goal – to appear dream-like) are the reason many critics forget that dream poetry is

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[22] Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 197.
[23] Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 194.
[24] Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 185.

not a dream but a literary text. It is the poet's conscious artistry that causes these critics to believe there is more unconscious artistry at work. Therefore the psychoanalysis, not only of Wilson's *The Romantic Dream*, but also of those critics who would not normally apply it but do so because it is a "dream" poem, is no more founded in Wordsworth's so called "nearer to an authentic dream"[25] than it is in any non-dream literature.

The source, if there ever was one, for "The Dream of the Arab" is, then, unimportant. If it were far more similar to a famous dream, Wordsworth may have intended his readers to be reminded of it or it may have added depth or insight into Wordsworth's passage. However Descartes' dream is too irrelevant to shed any light on "The Dream of the Arab" and even if it were certain that it was a source, it would only have given him an idea for a quite different tale. Where poets get their ideas is of little interest unless the source enlightens a reading of the poem. Indeed, Wordsworth creates a mysterious, unsettling atmosphere by not exposing who the friend is, and any attempt to give the friend an identity ignores, and in fact takes away, that sense of mystery from the text. Equally it does not matter whether or not Wordsworth, a friend, or Descartes ever had a similar dream because it is not the dream itself that exists today to be psychoanalyzed or otherwise critiqued. "The Dream of the Arab" is a consciously constructed part of Wordsworth's *Prelude* now, and it is as such that it must be considered.

In 1941, R. D. Havens argued that book five of *The Prelude* is "not unified or homogeneous."[26] He argued that the subject of great literature, the literature of

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[25] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 173.
[26] R. D. Havens, *The Mind of a Poet: A Study of Wordsworth's Thought with Particular Reference to "The Prelude"* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1941): 376.

Shakespeare and Milton, "heralded with so much pomp"[27] in the "lofty and extended introduction," does not continue, but peters out into a discussion merely of children's books – "A domed and spacious vestibule which leads only to the nursery."[28] He goes on to say that even this, which is still in some way connected with books, does not continue, but leads to a discussion of education in general and the need for nature and liberty, rather than book learning, in a child's education. Havens felt that these three sections of book five do not form a coherent whole and that there is a distinct "lack of unity."[29] Since that time there have been a few efforts to claim unity for book five by pointing out the continual reference to books of one kind or another, particularly books of romance and fairy tales versus moral literature and educational books. Geoffrey Hartman puts the matter straight when he says R. D. Havens is

> mistaken, for there are two kinds of books mentioned, one praised and one depreciated. [...] The books of adventure, poetry, and imagination to which Wordsworth refers gradualize our break with nature; they delay the overquick maturation of the child. But the books *attacked* (V. 347ff.) are those that interfere with this slower, natural maturing, being part of an adult conspiracy to control the child and plunge it as quickly as possible into manhood.[30]

Robert Barth agrees that book five "is a considerably more unified book than has often been admitted,"[31] and before continuing to an exploration of death and immortality in book five, points out the importance of books in "The Dream of the Arab":

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[27] Havens, *The Mind of a Poet,* 375.
[28] Havens, *The Mind of a Poet,* 376.
[29] Havens, *The Mind of a Poet,* 404 n4.
[30] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987): 226.
[31] J. Robert Barth S.J., "The Poet, Death, and Immortality: The Unity of *The Prelude*, Book V," *The Wordsworth Circle* 10 (1979): 69.

I begin with the premise, in agreement with Frank McConnell, that "the unifying act of the dream is not the rising of the waters but the reading of the book" (*The Confessional Imagination*, p. 133). The poet begins with the reading of Cervantes's book, the dream concerns the attempt of the Arab to save the books he holds from destruction, and the episode ends with the poet's return to the world of the reading of the book, with the book resting safely at his side. This emphasis on books, both in the dream and in its framing story, should serve to focus attention within the dream on the two symbols the Arab holds, the stone and the shell – the two books – which are evidently the "poetry and geometric truth" on which the poet had been musing when he fell asleep.[32]

The passage, Barth demonstrates, places great emphasis on books and the dream is unified by their appearance before, during and after the dream sequence.

While Hartman and Barth are correct, I would argue that there is even more unity with the theme of books than has yet been explored because not only is "The Dream of the Arab" connected by the books that appear in the passage (the stone, shell and *Don Quixote*), it is itself an example of the Arabian tales and stories of romance around which book five revolves. "The Dream of the Arab" demonstrates the kind of imaginative fiction that Wordsworth praises. Instead of "repeat[ing] / Some simply fashioned tale, to tell again / In slender accents of sweet verse some tale / That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now" (5: 176-79), which, he says, "might have well beseemed me" (5: 176), he creates a new tale to bewitch the reader – and indeed it has bewitched many readers, as shown by the popularity of the passage in

[32] Barth, "The Poet, Death, and Immortality," 69-70.

critical works. It is both an Arabian tale and a romance: its exotic desert imagery, though not entirely mythical, has the faraway, timeless quality of romance; its hero is both an Arab mounted on a dromedary, and a knight-errant on a crazed mission, his lance in rest. With its highly imaginative theme of saving from destruction the great written works of man, it encapsulates the essence of the wild tales praised throughout book five.

"The Dream of the Arab" also, as Robert Barth and other critics have observed, expresses "kindred hauntings" (5: 55) to those introduced at the beginning of the book. It deals explicitly with the perishable nature of books, and implicitly with fears and anxieties of man's mortality. Whereas writing about such fears outright can make them seem like "going far to seek disquietude" (5: 52), working them into a dream poem gives them more impact and elicits a more emotional, sympathetic response in the reader. A reader may be more apt to believe the anxiety is real if he believes it has shown itself in a dream – which may be one reason why Wordsworth claims it as his own in the 1850 version.

As a part of a dream sequence, the fear also appears to be more natural. Throughout *The Prelude* Wordsworth proclaims that fear is a natural teacher. He says he grew up "Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (1: 306). Dreams, too, are natural; it is human nature to dream and there is little one can do to manipulate what he dreams. If fear expressed itself in a dream, it must have seemed a natural teacher to Wordsworth. The passage also teaches fear naturally in being a tale of romance, for, Wordsworth believes, such tales prepare one to better cope with fear. When the drowned man of Esthwaite's Lake rose from the depths "with his ghastly face, a spectre shape – / Of terror even" (5: 472-73), Wordsworth says,

no vulgar fear,

> Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
>
> Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
>
> Such sights before among the shining streams
>
> Of fairyland, the forests of romance – (5: 473-77).

Fairy tales and romance with their strange, imaginative, sometimes ghoulish figures teach the imagination to deal with fear so that when one encounters fearful experiences in life, the mind has been prepared. Wordsworth agrees with Coleridge that tales of romance assist the education of children and help the imagination develop. In 1797 Coleridge had argued in a letter to Thomas Poole,

> from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c – my mind had been habituated *to the Vast* – & I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight* – even at that age. Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii? – I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. – I know no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the Great', & 'the Whole' (*CL* 1: 354).

Though Coleridge does not here argue about fear, both poets see the supernatural tales of romance as a natural development, as a way to enhance the growth of the imagination. "The Dream of the Arab" is the best example of Wordsworth's agreement as he here follows the style of Coleridge's own tales of romance – *The Ancient Mariner*, "Kubla Khan," and *Christabel* – to create a dream-poetry romance that, like a natural dream and like the books of romance and fairy tales, guides and teaches while it delights.

When, later in book five, Wordsworth describes the educationalist's ideal boy, he makes a crucial point about dreams. The boy is not "Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (1: 306), but rather, we are told, "fear itself, / Natural or supernatural alike" "Touches him not – " "*Unless* it leap upon him in a dream" (5: 315-18; my emphasis). Dreams are the one force that the educationalist cannot control; the boy may be rigorously taught to be fearless, but fear will still affect him, naturally, in dreams. Wordsworth insists that nature will have its way. Equally Wordsworth asserts that dreams, or nature with dreams as its instrument, have a kind of autonomy with more power than human will, for the fear *leaps* upon the boy in dreams, just as sleep *seizes* the dreamer of "The Dream of the Arab" before he passes into a dream (5: 70).

Wordsworth writes,

> This verse is dedicate to Nature's self
>
> And things that teach as Nature teaches: then,
>
> Oh, where had been the man, the poet where –
>
> Where had we been we two, belovèd friend,
>
> If we, in lieu of wandering as we did
>
> Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales
>
> Rich with indigenous produce, open ground
>
> Of fancy, happy pastures ranged at will,
>
> Had been attended, followed, watched, and noosed (5: 230-38).

"The Dream of the Arab" demonstrates the themes of the whole of book five by teaching "as Nature teaches" (5: 231), not only in being a dream poem and therefore seeming to be nature's own teaching, but also in being a tale with "open ground / Of fancy" (5: 236-37). What it teaches is the theme of the opening of book five: fear of God, fear of something greater than what mankind has control over, fear and

ultimately the necessity of accepting man's mortality, and through that fear, reverence. Robert Barth points out Wordsworth's questioning of "the immortality that poets have traditionally – and tenaciously – clung to, from the time of Horace on: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* – I have built a monument more lasting than bronze."[33] Wordsworth cuts down the pride and conceit of any poet who believes he has obtained immortality and attempts to instil reverence through fear for the spirit that makes man mortal. Yet he also expresses man and poet's longing for immortality, a hope that comes into its own towards the end of book five when he changes his tune, claiming that tales of romance, or "something in the shape / Of these will live till man shall be no more" (5: 528-29).

The passage also seems quite different from the rest of *The Prelude*; however, as with book five, it too has more unity than it at first appears. *The Prelude* is profoundly concerned with imagination, yet elsewhere it is the waking imagination – memory, contemplation, feeling and thoughtful experience – with which it deals. Wordsworth uses the word dream many times throughout the poem, but it is aspiration, ideal, vision, thought, daydream, and at most brief mentions of sleeping dreams to which he refers. "The Dream of the Arab" appears strangely different from the rest of the poem because it is the only extended section in which Wordsworth fully explores the imagination in sleeping dreams. However, without it, the poem would not explore all the facets of the imaginative mind. Wordsworth will have recognized that the dreaming imagination is also very powerful, and important to the growth of a poet's mind, not only for its natural fear, but also for its relationship with creativity. Dreams, when imagination is far stronger than reason, could be seen as nature's creativity. Though the passage may seem quite different from the rest of *The*

[33] Barth, "The Poet, Death, and Immortality," 73.

Prelude, its exploration of sleeping dreams is essential to completing the complex examination of the imaginative mind in *The Prelude* as a whole.

"The Dream of the Arab" is presented by means of a traditional dream frame that is similar to those of Medieval poetry, and very similar to those of Coleridge's yet-to-be-written preface to "Kubla Khan." Its traditional features include falling asleep on a summer afternoon in a natural setting, the reading of a great work of literature that will resurface within the dream, and a series of conscious thoughts profoundly related to the themes expressed in the dream. The preface to "Kubla Khan" also features a sleep on a summer's day, in a wild, natural setting (though inside a house in that setting), and a work of literature that will be related to the dream sequence. These are traditional features of dream poetry and the similarity is not surprising. However, both poets also emphasize in a similar manner the dreamer's passivity to the power of the imaginative mind. In the preface to "Kubla Khan" the Author passively "fell asleep," because of "the effects" of an "anodyne," during which time "all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort" ("Kubla Khan," 1.1: 511). Similarly in Wordsworth's frame, while still awake though sitting "listlessly," "thoughts / Came to [the friend], and to height unusual rose," when "at length, / His senses yielding to the sultry air, / Sleep seized him and he passed into a dream" (5: 60-62, 68-70). However, whereas Coleridge implies a direct correlation between the words read and the images and expressions of the dream, Wordsworth adds an intermediary phase of meditation: the words read lead to quite different thoughts, and both are directly related to the dream sequence.

The dream frame also announces the relationship of the passage to romance. Not only is the form of the passage that of dream-vision poetry as in many Medieval

romances, but it introduces the quasi-romance *Don Quixote* as "The famous *history* of the errant knight / Recorded by Cervantes" (5: 59-60; my emphasis), which gives the fiction a semi-mythological place in history much like the Khan and Xanadu have in "Kubla Khan."[34] Wordsworth is referring to the fact that within *Don Quixote* Cervantes says the tale is the true history of Alonso Quixano as recorded by Cid Hamet Ben Engali, then by Cervantes. Wordsworth thus adopts Cervantes' own myth-making to substantiate his own. There is a suggestion in the word "history" (5: 59) that it is a story, a fable, but "Recorded" (5: 60) then insists on the history as fact – a true, recorded event. The "history" (5: 59) parallels the dream sequence it inspires, for it is neither fact nor fiction and yet it is both at once. The poetic manipulation to place the tale somewhere in an indefinable history, somewhere between fact and fiction, gives it a mythological, or rather legendary, yet almost believable quality. The effect not only heightens the reader's suspension of disbelief, but also begins to give the tale "A substance" so that he might almost fancy the semi-Quixote "a living man" (5: 143).

Framing the passage as a dream sequence helps bring the exotic and apocalyptic into the realm of the ordinary. Since the rest of *The Prelude* takes place in Europe, in familiar settings for his readers, "The Dream of the Arab" seems out of place because it is so exotic. However since dreaming is a common phenomenon and dreams are often unfamiliar, strange and perhaps even exotic, the reader is able to place this tale within the realms of ordinary experience. It is more credible because even though few readers will have dreamt anything remotely similar, most can imagine that the poet's friend could have done so – it is possible (even if improbable). The dream frame allows Wordsworth to present the reader with a romance that

[34] See my chapter three for a discussion of "Kubla Khan," myth, remote exotic history, and romance.

demonstrates his opinions on the literature that naturally moulds the mind, without moving from an autobiographical to a purely fictional style. Dream poetry is a highly imaginative form that allows such exotic and apocalyptic fiction to blend with the poetry of everyday life.

Dream poetry is an almost lawless form. It does not need to adhere to reality, or to the conventions and laws that govern living existence. In reality a stone cannot be a book or a shell many gods, but in a dream it is barely questioned. This is the form of which De Quincey says, "The Dream is a law to itself" (*DQ* 20: 35) and of which, as I have quoted before, Lamb says, "There is no law to judge of the lawless, or canon by which a dream may be criticised" (*LW* 2: 65). Through this nearly lawless form, Wordsworth is able to present elements of exotic romance, an Arab on a dromedary, a knight errant on a quest to save from destruction the cornerstones of man's learning, in such a highly imaginative tale that he becomes one of those he calls friends, one of "Ye dreamers," "Forgers of lawless tales" (5: 547-48).

"The Dream of the Arab" passage reveals as it represents the relationship between dream and romance, between dream and imaginative creativity. Dream is idyllic, highly imaginative and in opposition to reality and, to an extent, waking reason; it is airy and intangible, like an image as opposed to the real substance, like an idea as opposed to the realization of that idea into something man-made. Romance is highly imaginative fiction that lies in opposition to realism; its characters may be ideal, or from a distant or fictitious era on a quest that is foreign from modern everyday life. Romance is exotic or distant; its faraway quality is as airy and intangible as dream. "The Dream of the Arab" uses dream to present its tale of romance so that each plays off the other and the effect is compounded to produce a credible yet extremely imaginative tale. Because dream poetry is almost lawless, the

romance can be even more imaginative than it could on its own. A reader will only suspend his disbelief so far in fiction – he may believe there is an Arab on a dromedary in the desert on a quest to bury books, but he would not believe that the books were a stone and a shell. It is beyond the point of believable fiction, but it is not beyond what is possible in dreams. Because dream poetry allows more imaginative events to be believable, it can be even more fanciful, even more romance than romance. Wordsworth's romance is heightened, given even more romance, by its presentation as dream poetry, and thus the relationship between the two is revealed in this dream-poetry romance.

The Romantics were interested in dreams not only, as some critics assume,[35] for the same reasons as contemporary philosophers, for the way they seemed to defy the laws of waking reality and complicate empirical philosophies, but also because they could be seen as nature's romances, as the imaginative mind creating its purest fictions. Using dream poetry to create romance could make its romance qualities appear of the purest kind, and it allowed a poet to explore the imaginative nature of both dream and romance. When Wordsworth presents his tale as both romance and dream, he is exploring the relationship between the two, and revealing the product of that relationship – what would have appeared to him to be a very highly-imaginative, natural form of fiction.

In the dream frame, the friend moves between three imaginative states of mind. At first he is reading *Don Quixote*, a tale of romance that could make a reader feel as if he had entered another realm, the imaginative world of the fictional characters. The move to thought or meditation on the frailty of books and man's

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[35] Critics who focus on the philosophical and theoretical interest in dreams include Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*; Richardson, "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind," 1-25; and Allen, "The Literary Dream."

mortality – "these same thoughts" (5: 60) – and his further thoughts "On poetry and geometric truth" "And their high privilege of lasting life" (5: 64, 66), is another profoundly imaginative experience since they "to height unusual rose" (5: 61). However it is not until he falls asleep that the imaginative state takes over completely – usurps the friend's imagination just as the deluge will threaten to obliterate the earth – and he loses touch with the scenery on the outside of the frame. Here "he passed into a dream" (5: 70), went over to the other side, as if it were another realm entirely, a parallel dimension. "Sleep seized him" (5: 70) as if involuntarily, and thrust him into the realm of pure imagination.

Once in the imaginative state the dreamer sees only a desert, wasteland, "wild wilderness" (5: 73) – a telling description of what, on one hand, he fears imagination could be. "Distress of mind / Was growing in him" (5: 74-75), the vast space of nothingness disturbing him, until his need conceives someone to teach him to navigate the wilderness. The guide that appears is from the tales of romance and will lead the dreamer just as later in book five (especially 5: 290-629) Wordsworth says the tales of romance guide children through the early years of life. The guide will not take the dreamer (nor will the tales take a child) to the end of the journey, leaving him to find his own way, but he does introduce him to the cornerstones of man's learning, teaches him the worth of poetry, lets him know the prophecy that it tells, and impresses upon him the importance of man's greatest works. In this vast wasteland the guide shows him treasure, just as the tales of romance feed a child's instincts and introduce him, through their imaginative kinship (5: 551), to man's greatest imaginative works.

Douglas Wilson, along with many other critics, claims that "Wordsworth's Arab dream is a nightmare."[36] When a nightmare is defined very generally as "a frightening or unpleasant dream"[37] then the term is correct in describing the state that the poet emulates. However, the passage does not have the terrifying horror scenes of literature that would commonly be described as nightmarish. It is not frightening for the reader like Gothic literature, and lacks the passion and extreme terror of Coleridge's "The Pains of Sleep," which many would associate more acutely with nightmares. Indeed it is no more nightmarish than Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* and is less so than Shelley's *The Triumph of Life.* When De Quincey deals with apocalypse in "The Dream-Fugue," the dreamer is caught in the middle of the horrifying, fast-paced action, and the reader feels the spine-chilling immediate threat of apocalypse as it happens. The pace of "The Dream of the Arab" is, as Coleridge says of Wordsworth's rhythm generally, "a motion of a man walking in a dream" (*CTT* 1: 306). Its apocalypse is imminent, not immediate, and its threat is of potentiality. The dominant feelings explored in and through the passage are foreboding and fear of the unknown, rather than outright terror, and as such perhaps a better description than nightmare would be a "disturbing anxiety dream."

"The Dream of the Arab" expresses a poet's anxieties for the endurance of the imagination, of man's need for poetry, and for the perseverance of the great works of literature themselves. The passage is Wordsworth's attempt to show the fears of a poet as they exist, unresolved. As such, throughout the passage there is a sense of underlying anxieties and fears that are avoided and left unconfronted as the dream moves between fearful situations and those of safety and calm, even joy. Initially the

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[36] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 184. See also Wilson 174, Philmus, "Wordsworth and the Interpretation of Dreams," 184-205, particularly 192.
[37] "Nightmare," *The New Oxford Dictionary of English.* Cf: *Oxford English Dictionary.*

dreamer feels a sense of isolation when he discovers himself alone in the desert wilderness. His "Distress of mind" (5: 74) might have grown into fear, but unwilling to confront the situation alone, his will creates a guide to give him hope, council and companionship. The dreamer is relieved that the Arab appears and feels "great joy" (5: 76) as the isolation is, for the moment, ended. He has avoided, for now, his fears, and moves his attention instead to the strange and magnificent character before him.

The Arab is described as a mighty figure of stature, "mounted high" (5: 77) above the dreamer upon a great beast. His lance gives him a courtly appearance, and the treasure he bears, his stone and dazzling shell "Of a surpassing brightness" (5: 81), add a quality of eminence.[38] The dreamer feels "great joy" (5: 76) when the Arab appears and "rejoiced / [...] that he should have a guide / To lead him through the desert" (5: 81-83). The dreamer never questions whether he is friend or foe – he is a leader. The Arab at first lives up to his eminence and his role as leader by knowing, before the dreamer speaks, what he is thinking and answers without being questioned:

> [the dreamer] thought,
>
> While questioning himself what this strange freight
>
> Which the newcomer carried through the waste
>
> Could mean, the arab told him [...] (5: 83-86).

Yet for all the confidence the dreamer has in the guide and the certainty the Arab has regarding his treasure, the dream hovers cautiously and uncertainly, refusing to be pinned down to the actuality of fiction. The dreamer does not *find* himself in a desert, but rather "*fancied* that himself / Was sitting there" (5: 72-73; my emphasis). Though the Arab is described as a mighty figure, Wordsworth cautiously says he "*seemed* an

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[38] In the 1850 version the additional description of the Arab as an "uncouth shape" (5: 75) alters the description significantly. Here, as throughout this chapter, I am referring only to the 1805 version.

arab of the Bedouin tribes" (5: 78; my emphasis) and the dreamer merely "*thought* [...] the arab told him" (5: 83, 86; my emphasis) the meaning of the stone and shell. This tension between confidence and uncertainty creates an aura of dream: the uncertainty panders to the waking reason of the reader by not attempting to wholly convince him of the dream's truth, yet the confidence works alongside it as an undercurrent to create the overall effect of a convincing tale. Like Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls,* as discussed in chapter one, Wordsworth does not demand belief in the dream so as not to alienate sceptics, yet he draws in believers by parallel means. The eminence and commanding tone (5: 92) of the Arab convince readers to believe in the dream.

As the Arab reveals the stone and shell to be books, the poem becomes more and more surreal, stranger and more dream-like. Language and image become confused, as do the narrator and dreamer. Although technically Wordsworth is clear in the 1805 version, through his use of quotation marks, that it is the friend who is speaking, the change from the dreamer as "he" (5: 71-88) to the dreamer as "I" (5: 93-139) marks a change in sympathy as the reader and narrator become more involved in the dream. The narrative acts in a manner similar to a dream Coleridge recorded in his notebooks:

> The Tale of the Dream began in two *Images* – in two Sons of a Nobleman, desperately fond of shooting – brought out by the Footman to resign their Property, & to be made believe that they had none / they were far too cunning for that / as they struggled & resisted their cruel Wrongers, & my interest for them, I suppose, increased, I became they – the duality vanished (*CNB* 1: 1649).

As Coleridge's interest in and sympathy for the dream's protagonists increased, he became them – he, the onlooker, became the protagonist. Wordsworth's dream sequence works similarly, drawing the reader in as the narrator, originally an outsider, takes on the role as dreamer through the manipulation of the first person. Though Wordsworth does not, in the 1805 version, actually claim to be the dreamer, the use of "I" works to create a sympathy and an involvement with the protagonist that is much closer than a third person dreamer.

The confusion of language and image is one of the major dream-like effects of the poem. Wordsworth calls it "the language of the dream" (5: 87) and it is one of the main points of critical interest for "The Dream of the Arab." Why the books should be represented by a stone and a shell has caused some debate and many varied interpretations.[39] However, it is exactly this dislocation of language and image that gives the sequence its most dream-like quality. The reader knows that "*Euclid's Elements*" (5: 88), imaged as a stone that stays quietly but weightily tucked under the Arab's arm, suggests one of the concrete cornerstones of man's learning, the foundations of the laws that govern the universe, ancient eternal truths. He knows the shell that utters a prophetic ode in an unknown yet understandable language suggests the eternal wisdom of the most timeless music and poetry. These are "poetry and geometric truth" (5: 64), the subject of the friend's thoughts before he fell asleep. Yet

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[39] Critics who seek to interpret the stone and the shell beyond "poetry and geometric truth" (5: 64) often make reference to the two books of Nature and Scripture or Logos. See, for example, Kelley, "Spirit and Geometric Form"; Ragussis, "Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream," 148-65; and Bernhardt-Kabisch, "The Stone and the Shell," 455-90. The many other interpretations include reference to the stone and shell as symbols of dispassionate (stone) and passionate (shell) human relations, Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*; two universal languages, Ragussis, "Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream," 148-65; "the simplest, most primitive means of calculation or record-keeping and artistic expression," Bernhardt-Kabisch, "The Stone and the Shell," 472; and "the twin peaks of the romantic and Wordsworthian Parnassus – of Head and Heart, Reason and Passion or Imagination, Law and Impulse, Form and Feeling, Mathesis and Poesis, geometry and geomancy, Logos and Mythos, celestial and elemental, Masonry and Music, Apollo and Dionysus, *esprit de géometrie* and *esprit de finesse*," Bernhardt-Kabisch, "The Stone and the Shell," 478.

the fact that the reader cannot quite grasp the reason why the books appear as a stone and a shell, or what the exact relationship between language and image might be, gives the poem a sense of profound knowledge, a sense that it knows more than the reader. Readers may seek to interpret the symbols, to discover the relationship, but that is precisely because of their dream-like nature. Dreams have their own language that seems symbolic if one only knew the language to interpret it. Freud and Artemidorus are among those who have attempted to learn the language of dreams. Yet it is also a quality of dreams that their language escapes the waking, rational mind. Had the books appeared in the shape of books or had the stone and shell fit into a straightforward allegory, the dream sequence would have been less dream-like. The gap in reader understanding of the relationship between language and image is one of the most effective dream-poetry techniques in "The Dream of the Arab."

The Arab carries two treasures, both of which are of great enough importance to warrant a mission to save them from destruction. Even so, the shell "Is something of more worth" (5: 90) than the stone. Wordsworth does not forget the significance of mathematics and science, but poetry is, in this tale of a poet's anxiety dream, of more concern. Although it requires great imagination to discover the laws of mathematics and science, to Wordsworth, poetry is the highest representation of the imagination and the greatest expression of truth and hope. Both the stone and shell are a part of nature and, significantly, connected with the sea. A stone can be moulded, made smooth, by the sea, just as mathematics and science exist as eternal laws, truth and facts, but our understanding of them is moulded by the human imagination. A shell that one lifts to the ear to hear the sounds of the sea, comes from the sea, just as poetry comes from the imagination and represents it, yet also voices the beauty and power of the imagination. They are ambassadors that, when taken from the sea, tell of

its nature and its power. Here they are remnants of the sea in this desert where Old Ocean is dried up, remnants of imagination in a time when it is "left singed and bare" (5: 31-32).

The desert is a source of anxiety to the dreamer who on one hand fears that Old Ocean has dried up. When the dreamer holds the shell to his ear, what has until now been a haunting undercurrent of anxieties, comes to the fore, as the very opposite, a deluge, is foretold. These twin fears are, as Geoffrey Hartman says, a Scylla and Charybdis.[40] The dreamer fears for the endurance of imagination, fears that it could be "left singed and bare" (5: 32), yet on the other hand fears as well the sublime, overpowering potential of imagination that threatens to engulf the imaginative mind and destroy "the children of the earth" (5: 98).

The new fear for Old Ocean is expressed by the shell, which is part of the ocean itself. The fear of imaginative potential comes directly from the imagination's own voice, poetry. From the shell the dreamer

> [...] heard that instant in an unknown tongue,
>
> Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
>
> A loud prophetic blast of harmony,
>
> An ode in passion uttered, which foretold
>
> Destruction to the children of the earth
>
> By deluge now at hand (5: 94-99).

The lines have a chilling atmosphere, resounding of Biblical prophecy and Revelation. Like "Kubla Khan's" "Ancestral voices prophesying war" (30), they seem laden with import, with a knowledge that transcends time, an omniscient understanding of eternal truths. Through the emotions they invoke in the dreamer and

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[40] Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814,* 230.

the reader, they explore a human fear of the unknown, fear of something larger than the realm of the familiar, something powerful and not understood. The imminent threat of destruction coupled with a fearful submission to a higher, infinitely wiser power, an unspoken admission that destruction is inevitable and beyond human control, creates a sublime feeling of apocalyptic tragedy.

Like the language of the dream, the ode is in an "unknown tongue" (5: 94), yet just as the basic meaning of the stone and shell is grasped, so too is the ode understood. Its poetry is truth, "A loud prophetic blast" (5: 96) that the Arab confirms is true (5: 101), though it is fearful, foretelling destruction. The lines are riddled with contradiction, a confusion that adds impact to the sense of fearful unknown. While the ode is understood, the word "prophetic" (5: 96) has an eerie feeling of that which is beyond the realm of what can be understood, and though he understands that destruction by deluge is imminent, he does not know why, which creates a feeling of suspense. The ode is in an unknown tongue, yet it is understood. It is articulate, yet "uttered," which seems almost muttered, and a loud blast, yet harmonious (5: 94-97). Though it tells of destruction and apocalypse, it is yet, in its harmony, in its godly voice, "A joy, a consolation, and a hope" (5: 109). As a description of poetry it is complex, hailing poetry's truth, however fearful, its harmony, in its varying forms, its passion, its power, and its solace. While the lines express Wordsworth's fears for the sublime potential of the imagination, so too do they hail its beauty through the description of the poetry it creates.

The lines are themselves powerful, and with their eschatological theme they invoke an unsettling atmosphere of anxiety. Had the passage continued to confront such intense fear, it might have become the "nightmare" that Douglas Wilson, among

other critics, claims "The Dream of the Arab" to be.[41] However, no sooner does the fear come to the fore, and the pace and nightmarish power increase than it immediately backs down and is ignored. Just as Coleridge often did in his notebooks and did with *Christabel*, the passage, as if in fear, backs away from exploring the nightmare further. The lines are followed by soft "s" sounds and soothing words in "No sooner ceased / The song," "ceased" signifying a certain end, "song" adding a lullabyish feel (5: 99-100). The Arab is not frantically instilling terror, but rather "calm" (5: 100) as he gravely tells the dreamer of his plan to save the books from destruction. The word "bury" (5: 103) harks back to the earlier unsettling feeling. The fear for the future of poetry is still there, but it returns from near-terror, near-nightmare, to anxiety.

The poem continues to back away from the powerful lines and the nightmare they are afraid to confront, as they ignore the former train of thought and its implications, and divert attention to another description of the books:

> The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
>
> And wedded man to man by purest bond
>
> Of nature, undisturbed by space or time;
>
> Th' other that was a god, yea many gods,
>
> Had voices more than all the winds, and was
>
> A joy, a consolation, and a hope (5: 104-9).

The description slows the pace back down and focuses on the eternal nature of poetry and geometric truth and their value and significance, which attempts to contradict the fear for the frailty of the books within which they are held. If one holds acquaintance with stars and is the bond between man and man through nature, if it is undisturbed by

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[41] Wilson, *The Romantic Dream,* 174, 184.

space or time, then surely it is eternal and destruction of its representation in books cannot destroy the thing itself. If the other is a god, or many gods, surely an earthly flood could not defeat it, or so the narrative argues in an attempt to restore confidence and hope. No longer nightmarish, the vocabulary attempts to sooth the tone with such congenial words as "acquaintance," "wedded," "purest bond," "nature," "undisturbed" and "god," to culminate in the final uplifting and heartening statement – that poetry is "A joy, a consolation, and a hope" (5: 104-9). The soothing words have the effect of calming the narrative down and presenting a more reassuring train of thought.

When Coleridge backed down in fear from his terrifying thoughts, he very often launched into an analysis of his dreams. Rationalization, philosophy, and scientific enquiry diverted his imagination from the depths he was too fearful to explore. It is particularly Coleridgean that the dreamer suddenly launches into analysis as a diversion tactic. The passage as a whole does not have an overall feeling of nightmare mainly because in the very middle, just as it reached near-terror, it slows down to almost complete detachment with a Coleridgean scientific analysis of dreaming:

> Strange as it may seem
>
> I wondered not, although I plainly saw
>
> The one to be a stone, and th' other a shell,
>
> Nor doubted once but that they both were books,
>
> Having a perfect faith in all that passed (5: 110-14).

Not only is the diversion tactic Coleridgean, but so too is the analysis, for this is a clear delineation of a phenomenon that Coleridge often noticed in his dreams and

expressed in his notebooks (from as early as 1802[42]) and lectures, and it is the very basis of his theory of the suspension of disbelief. As has been discussed in chapters one and three, Coleridge was intrigued by the lack of surprise felt in sleep, by the fact "that the strangest ~~Im~~ and most sudden transformations do not produce any sensation of Surprize" (*CLL* 1: 131) in dreams. The "perfect faith" (5: 114) that dreamers have in their dreams was a model, he felt, for the faith an author needed to make his audience feel for the truth of the tale. The lines are very Coleridgean in every way, and if Coleridge had no part in the composing or editing of this passage, he would certainly have enjoyed, in the early years, seeing his thoughts on dreaming appear in his friend's great poem.

The dream sequence also moves from a sense of surreal dream to one more of reality in its vocabulary of vision. Throughout the passage until this point the sense of vision hovers in uncertainty: "he fancied" (5: 72), "he seemed" (5: 78), "he thought" (5: 83), but now when uncertainty is too frightening, and a rational analysis is underway, the poem states firmly, "I plainly saw" (5: 111). The imagination's dark recesses and grey areas have become too fearful and a dose of certainty in a rational analysis completes the step back, the breath of fresh air, before the action of the dream can continue.

At line 115 the action of the dream does continue, as it inches forward, not as far as the near-terror, but toward the emotions of anxiety. "A wish was now engendered in my fear / To cleave unto this man" (5: 116-17) is a powerful statement that acknowledges a desire begot by fear. Its language is particularly susceptible to Freudian analysis, yet is Biblical as well. The word "engendered" (5: 116) suggests

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[42] *CNB* 1: 1250 is the earliest recorded dream where Coleridge notes the lack of surprise in sleep, but this appears near the beginning of the first notebook and reads as if he has noticed this many times before. *CNB* 2: 2559 is another example. For the lectures, see especially *CLL* 1: 131.

once again that fear is a teacher, a father, while "cleave" (5: 117), recalling Genesis, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh,"[43] demonstrates his powerful desire to be one with the guide, and not to be left alone, as well as fidelity and commitment to that guide. However, the guide remains detached, ignores him, temporarily resumes guidance, yet eventually deserts him. One is reminded of the tales of romance that guide the child in the growth of his imagination later in book five, and of the fact that they cannot lead him throughout life, but rather leave him to discover greater works of imaginative literature – "Shakespeare or Milton" (5: 165) – to lead him further.

The dreamer, now introduced to the stone, shell, and the shell's ode, sympathizes with the Arab's quest and "begged leave / To share his errand with him" (5: 116-17). The vocabulary returns to that of romance with the Arab's "wild look" (5: 119), "his twofold treasure" (5: 120), his "dromedary" and "lance in rest" (5: 121), which build to a return of the dreamer's imaginative powers, after the brief rational diversion, and now he

> [...] fancied that he [the Arab] was the very knight
>
> Whose tale Cervantes tells, yet not the knight,
>
> But was an Arab of the desert too,
>
> Of these was neither, and was both at once (5: 123-26).

The form of dream again allows such a highly imaginative narrative to be believable, and such contradictions to exist in harmony side by side. The dreamer's fancy is such that it permits a completely irrational idea to be accepted, for only the imagination could accept that he "was neither, and was both at once" (5: 126). The Arab was

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[43] Genesis 2. 24. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

always a figure of romance, but now he is more so, being also a Don Quixote, and the dreamer, temporarily through sympathy, is not just an imaginative dreamer, but a Sancho Panza as well.

The dream sequence inches further into deeply unsettling territory as the narrative remembers the imminent threat. The Arab's countenance "grew more disturbed" (5: 127) and with glances back to the fearful threat, the Arab's prophetic language – "'It is,' said he, 'the waters of the deep / Gathering upon us'" (5: 130-31) – instils again the deep fear. The quickening of the Arab's pace quickens also the pace of the narrative. In short phrases the Arab deserts the dreamer, the dreamer calls after him, and the Arab ignores him leaving him fully behind to a panoramic view of the romance-like scene:

> [...] before me full in view –
>
> I saw him riding o'er the desert sands
>
> With the fleet waters of the drowning world
>
> In chace of him (5: 134-37).

The narrative comes closer and closer again to a nightmarish atmosphere, but again rejecting confrontation, the view of the dream scenery gives a sense of awe and of strangely intriguing romance, and the dreamer, who has achieved the sensation of terror, wakes up before it can be explored. As Geoffrey Hartman has observed, at the beginning of the dream sequence "The desert is the ocean already singed and bare: by dream-prolepsis we evade the drying-up or actual moment of apocalypse." Likewise at the end, the dreamer "wakes, and the flood seems to have passed over, for he discovers the sea before him. The moment of confrontation is again avoided."[44] The

[44] Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814,* 231.

dreamer's momentary terror is replaced with the reassuring familiarity of his surroundings prior to the dream, and of his book still safely at his side.

The final view in the dream sequence, the panorama of the Arab riding through the desert, the "waters of the drowning world / In chace of him" (5: 136-37), has a particular quality of romance. It is profound and meaningful, and is a memorable scene that, motionless like a painting, stays fixed in the mind. Immediately following it, the dreamer wakes to the scenery of the outside of the dream frame, the natural, though wild and romantic, setting of the cave with "the sea before me (5: 138). The Arab/Quixote figure racing through his timeless, exotic desert, followed by the closing of a traditional dream frame in a wild, natural setting, with *Don Quixote* at the dreamer's side, is a final and powerful reminder that this is Wordsworth's tale of romance.

"The Dream of the Arab" expresses a poet's fears for the endurance of the imagination and the future of poetry. It moves between the fear that imagination may dry up and leave the mind singed like a desert, and the fear that imagination's extreme power could overwhelm and flood the mind, leaving it unable to function, unable, as it did in Shelley's *Alastor*, to see beyond itself. Yet far from a nightmare, "The Dream of the Arab" is the tale of an anxiety dream and though the dreamer wakes in terror, having been able to dream and then tell in poetry such an imaginative romance is evidence that his fears are not justified. It is an affirmation that the imagination will live forever in dreams, and will always provide material for creativity in poetry.

While many dream poems would end with the dreamer's awakening, or even, as in the case of many Medieval dream poems, before the frame has closed, Wordsworth's reflection on the dream is very much a part of "The Dream of the Arab." This is partly because Wordsworth's dream poem is, unlike most, part of a

larger work, but it is also because typically Wordsworth's reflection on experience is an integral part of the experience itself. What is exceptional about the reflection experience in "The Dream of the Arab" is that, according to the 1805 version, the original experience was not his own. Nevertheless, he takes the Arab, gives him "A substance" (5: 143), and shapes him (5: 147). He reflects on the character and gives him a new life in his thoughts.

Far from treating "The Dream of the Arab" as a nightmare, feeling terror at the thought of it, Wordsworth reflects fondly on the dream sequence, feels "reverence" (5: 150) for the Arab and believes that, in the same position, he too would "go / Upon like errand" (5: 160-61). "The Dream of the Arab" is rather a romance in which the madness and pure imagination, the dream world, of a Quixote figure is hailed and praised. The passage reinforces a love that many Romantic poets shared for Don Quixote as the hero of imagination, as a man who gives up the sanity and reason of everyday life to live in and keep alive the imaginative world. Wordsworth expresses such love and reverence for the great works of imagination that, like Don Quixote, he would leave even his family and loved ones behind to save the great works from destruction:

> Enow there are on earth to take in charge
> Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,
> Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear –
> Enow to think of these – yea, will I say,
> In sober contemplation of the approach
> Of such great overthrow, made manifest
> By certain evidence, that I methinks
> Could share that maniac's anxiousness, could go

Upon like errand (5: 153-61).

Wordsworth places the value of great literature, in his own estimation, on par with that of human life. He would not see humanity destroyed, but would leave its safety to others. In this instance Wordsworth forgets his humanist tendencies and claims, as his first love, literature. Reason lies couched (5: 152), he believes, in the acknowledgement by the dream sequence of the value of literature and he sympathizes with and reveres the heroes of imagination.

The epilogue furthers the affirmation of the endurance of imagination, for it is not only in the dream that imagination proves that it lives, but also in memory and reflection. When Wordsworth recalls "This arab phantom" (5: 141), his imagination gives the Arab "A substance, fancied him a living man" (5: 143) – his imagination has the power to recreate the dream and bring the character to life. He has the power to sympathize with the Arab and to imagine he "Could share that maniac's anxiousness, could go / Upon like errand" (5: 160-61). With dreams occurring naturally in sleep, with the ability of "Poesy" to "tell her dreams" (*The Fall of Hyperion* 8) and finally, with the power to recreate the dream in the mind's eye, sympathize and imagine oneself in the role of the character, this is truly an affirmation that the imagination will always provide the material for poetic creativity. Though poetry may be bound in a perishable handheld volume, in a "Poor earthly casket" (5: 164), by the end Wordsworth recognizes that it is nevertheless "immortal verse" (5: 164). Though the books may one day be destroyed, the imagination will always endure. It will remember and bring to life the great works of literature so that through imagination and memory they will live forever, and it will create new works as well, for through a human need for romance and imaginative fiction, Wordsworth finally declares, "something in the shape / Of these will live till man shall be no more" (5: 528-29).

"The Dream of the Arab" reveals as it represents the way in which the imagination always provides material for creativity. Wordsworth uses the form of dream poetry because it allows him to express, in subject, his fears for the endurance of imaginative works, even as, in form, he demonstrates how the imagination inevitably will endure, how the great works live within the memory, and how the imagination will always produce new creative works. By expressing his fears, not only in poetry, but also in an imaginative dream-framed romance, Wordsworth is proving the very opposite of the fears of which he writes. The form works alongside the subject matter and in the end it is the form, its role as dream poetry, that affirms for Wordsworth the endurance, the immortal nature, of the imagination.

Chapter Five

Keats: *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*

From his earliest poetry, from "Sleep and Poetry" and *Endymion,* through to *The Eve of St. Agnes,* "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," "A Dream, after reading Dante's Episode of Paulo and Francesca," "Sonnet to Sleep," "Ode to a Nightingale" and *Lamia*, Keats constantly explored the relationship between dreams, the imagination and poetry. These many explorations culminate in *The Fall of Hyperion*, Keats's last great poem, where he uses the form of dream poetry to represent the relationship between dreams and poetry that the poem confronts. It is a relationship demonstrated through attention to Moneta's arguments and to the way in which the narrative unfolds. *The Fall* responds to the Romantic-era debate that poetry is a dream by showing that dream as an imaginative state is an integral part of the poetic process, but that without the translation into language, into an enduring form, it cannot be poetry. Keats's poem of process is reflected in the poetic process outlined in its dream poetry form.

When Keats revised his abandoned epic poem *Hyperion* as *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, he altered the *in medias res* beginning by giving the poem a dream frame with a first person narrator. Charles Armitage Brown recalled some years after Keats's death that "In the evenings [Keats was] deeply engaged in remodelling his poem of 'Hyperion' into a 'Vision.' The change in the conduct of this poem has not, in the opinion of his friends, been regarded as an improvement."[1] Challenging popular critical opinion, certain critics agree with Keats's friends that the second attempt was not as fruitful as the first. D. G. James and Thomas McFarland

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[1] Hyder Edward Rollins, ed. *The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers and More Letters and Poems of the Keats Circle,* 2nd ed, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965) 72. Quoted in Thomas McFarland, *The Masks of Keats: The Endeavour of a Poet* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 112.

further believe that the frame restricted the poem and that it could never have achieved as much in such a form. McFarland believes "the later poem is a less ambitious undertaking than the original *Hyperion*."[2] James too says Keats "falls back on something less ambitious, reduces his style from anything approaching the epic level"[3] and further believes "Keats was aware that in the second version he was attempting something intrinsically inferior; for in large measure he had sacrificed objective invention, and his heart could not be in what he was doing in the same degree."[4]

These charges may stem from an Aristotelian belief that epic is one of the highest forms of poetry, but it is likely that they also stem from a lack of understanding of the new form Keats adapted. *The Fall of Hyperion* closely follows the dream-vision conventions, modelling itself in the tradition of Keats's long-favoured Chaucer and of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In Keats's time the dream-vision form of Dante was not considered "intrinsically inferior"[5] to Milton's epic style, and its renewed discovery gave it a more innovative quality. Additionally, unlike the epic form, through the medium of dream vision, Keats is able to show, as Dante did, a god-like perspective of his subject, yet at the same time he is able to show emotion and sympathy through a first person experience.

The original *Hyperion* is concerned primarily with the nature of progress and cycles of mutability in the grand scheme. While on one level it focuses on a younger generation of poets surpassing past great poets like Milton, it also includes more general motifs such as son overtaking father and the new taking the place of the old. The poem deals with general issues on a monumental scale. In *The Fall of Hyperion*,

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[2] McFarland, *The Masks of Keats,* 113.
[3] D. G. James, *The Romantic Comedy* (London: Oxford UP, 1948) 146; quoted in McFarland, *The Masks of Keats,* 117.
[4] James, *The Romantic Comedy*, 146; quoted in McFarland, *The Masks of Keats*, 118.
[5] James, *The Romantic Comedy,* 146; quoted in McFarland, *The Masks of Keats*, 118.

Keats closes in more acutely on the role of the poet and the relationship of dreams and poetry. Where dreams played no significant role in the main theme of *Hyperion*, Keats places them squarely in the forefront of *The Fall*. The latter poem still deals with the issues of the former, but with a more intense focus on the younger poet and his struggle to achieve the status he desires. By outlining the poet's growth as from dreamer into poet, Keats is making the poem far more personal.

The Fall signals a regretful acknowledgement that progression is necessary. It sees the life of sensations and emotions as a beautiful, pure, and childlike stage in which one unfortunately cannot remain, and it, too, honours the stages of progression and growth in which the man of thought is able to recognize, understand, and reflect upon the beauty of his former emotional experiences and rationally turn it to good use. *The Fall* savours the stage of the dreamer – pure, primitive, uncivilized, and innocent – but acknowledges the need to move on to the goal of poet – knowledgeable, communicative, and productive. Walter Jackson Bate says that as a "self-imposed challenge, [*The Fall of Hyperion*] – which was to include a bitter attack on the whole conception of poetry as dream, retreat, or escape – is itself frankly cast as a dream vision."[6] Bate recognizes that the reason Keats does so is because "the closest possible wrestle with the subject is promised, and one that will involve form itself."[7] Keats chooses the dream-vision form because it takes the site of the action immediately to the imagination where he can best explore the role of the poet and show the critical distinction between dreamers and poets.

The first section of *The Fall*, which introduces the main argument of Canto I as a dream-vision prologue, delineates between dreamers and poets. The argument responds to the charges outlined in chapter one, that poetry is a dream and a poet a

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[6] Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats*, Belknap Press (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963; rpt, 1999) 588.
[7] Bate, *John Keats*, 588.

dreamer. Where Lamb and Coleridge had responded by qualifying the statement to poetry is a *waking* dream and insisting "the true poet dreams being awake" (*LW* 2: 187), Keats concentrates on the product of the dream, the poetry, as the difference. Fanatics and savages dream, just as poets do, but they "have not / Trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf / The shadows of melodious utterance" and so "bare of laurel they live, dream, and die" (1: 4-7). Their dreams will not be remembered. Only poetry can transform the dream into a form that can be shared:

> For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
>
> With the fine spell of words alone can save
>
> Imagination from the sable charm
>
> And dumb enchantment (1: 8-11).

Poetry alone can materialize the imagination. Dream is depicted as a form of black magic and enchantment; to dream, to live within the imagination, is for Keats here, as it is for Shelley in *Alastor*, tempting but futile. Yet poetry is also a charm, a "fine spell of words" (1: 9) – one thinks of the charm of "Kubla Khan" – though it is one that will save imagination from dreaming, because it is productive and because it will be remembered and shared.

The prologue echoes "Kubla Khan" in its reminder of the primitive nature of dreams, as well as in calling poetry "The shadows of melodious utterance" (1: 6). Poetry is not the dream – the thought or idea – itself, both poems insist, it is only a "shadow" ("Kubla Khan" 1.1: 31) – not the ideal, but the human expression of it. The utterance is melodious because it is much closer to the dream. It is language, not emotion, but it is the primary expression of it, whereas poetry, like memory, is a secondary experience. When one reads of an incident in poetry, the reader only experiences it through the poet and not first-hand. Poetry is the record of a dream.

Yet like memory it allows one to experience it again and again. Its ability to transcend time and be shared save it from the dumb enchantment of the dream even though it is but a shadow. It is not the dream, but is an enduring copy that allows the dream not to be forgotten.

In "Kubla Khan," as mentioned in chapter three, the Khan can be seen as the leader who "ordered letters to be invented for his people" (*CNB* 1: 1281), as a figure who transformed utterance into written language and in doing so may have destroyed the primal imagery of spoken language, but gave his people the capability to transform it into an enduring written form. It is a process that parallels the transformation of dream to poetry. In *The Fall* Keats grapples with similar issues, with the tensions between the vain ideal of dream and the productive shadow of poetry, as well as with the corresponding transition from spoken to written language. In the prologue it is not only the fanatic and savage who have verbal "utterance" (1: 6); although they are pitied for not writing it down (1: 4-5), the poet likewise is not said to write, but to "tell" (1: 8, 12), "speak" (1: 14) and "rehearse" (1: 16). Keats is recalling the bardic traditions in which poetry was passed on verbally. He is privileging speech, but he does so in writing. In this respect there is tension throughout *The Fall* between spoken poetry as primitive and closer to the dream, and carefully constructed well-written poetry – a tension that is at the heart of the form and expressed in the term "dream poetry."

The relationship between poetry and dreams is further delineated as the prologue asks "Who alive can say / 'Thou art no poet; may'st not tell thy dreams'?" (1: 11-12). The task of poetry is to transcribe or "tell her dreams" (1: 8), and everyone – fanatic, savage, poet and all else "whose soul is not a clod" (1: 13) – has dreams. Keats is anchoring the poet to reality and everyday life by insisting a poet is

not very different. A poet is no more a visionary than anyone else, not more aligned with madness or other dreamers, but simply one who has "been well nurtured in his mother tongue" (1: 15). Yet Keats praises and raises the poet above others by saying that "every man whose soul is not a clod / [...] would speak" (1: 13-14) if he could, insinuating that those who do not, quite simply cannot. Those who are not poets either have a clod for a soul or no love or command of language. As well as a definition of a poet, it is a challenge to the critics of poetry, to those who call poetry a dream and the poet a dreamer. The greatest challenge, however, is in the final lines of the prologue, for the endurance of poetry is emphasized: a poet's work will be remembered; the dreams of the fanatic will not. Time will prove Keats a poet, not a futile dreamer.

Having defined the terms of the argument, the poet fulfills his role and tells his dream. The first dream frame at line 19 is signalled by the word "Methought" (1: 19), the conventional signal of Chaucerian and other Medieval dream poems. In "Methought as Dream Formula in Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats and Others," Eleanor Cook shows how Keats follows Milton in Eve's account of her dream (*PL* 5: 35-93) and Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (4.1: 76-214). Cook sets out to prove that "methought" in *The Fall of Hyperion* and other poems is not accidental, but draws on Shakespeare and Milton's usage. She is certainly right in this, but she sees Shakespeare as the earliest source and misses the entire history of dream poetry. "Methought" was often used in Medieval dream poetry to signal the beginning of the dream sequence. *Piers Plowman*, The *Prologue* to *The Legend of Good Women*, *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Flower and the Leaf*, the latter two of which Keats certainly knew, are just a handful of the many Medieval poems that make use of "methought" as a dream-vision convention. Keats follows a tradition of

using "methought" to tell the tale of a dream that harks back to Shakespeare and Milton, but also to Medieval dream poetry.

Although it appears that it is not until line 57 that the narrator falls asleep, the dream begins at line 19, with the story previous to the dream being non-existent. The reader knows nothing of a poet who lies down on a hillside or is lying awake troubled with anxiety when he originally falls asleep. Apart from the prologue, which has no narrative story, the entire poem is set in a dreamscape. The garden is a popular dream setting in Medieval dream poetry, following *Roman de la Rose*. Yet the description of the garden is distinctly Keatsian, and it is only the idea for the frame in which Keats follows tradition.

The garden scene is sensual, atmospheric and dream-like. As well as signalling the dream frame, "Methought" (1: 19) adds a hint of dream-like confusion. The garden is exotic, full of "trees of every clime" (1: 19) and "spice blossoms" (1: 21) in full summer bloom. The narrator[8] simply stands still breathing in the sights, sounds and scents. The setting is certainly a garden, not a forest, for as well as the exotic trees and an abundance of flowers, there is a sound of fountains nearby. As he turns around he sees a "feast of summer fruits" (1: 29) amidst the flower-covered arbour, yet still he dwells on the sensual nature of the scene before him.

Medieval dream poetry is often, if not always, allegorical, and in Keats's own way he follows the tradition in this aspect as well. Irene Chayes explains:

> For many, perhaps, "allegory" is still an unwelcome word in relation to Keats; yet in the account of the dream there are parallels also, highly important ones, with the passages of allegory that are a prominent part of the dream-vision of the Middle Ages. As early as *Endymion*, Keats

[8] I avoid calling the narrator "the dreamer" or "the poet" as other critics do so as not to confuse the distinctions made in the prologue or his progressive status in the poem.

had used narrative and description of a kind which, although it need not begin from an abstraction, often is not complete until it has yielded a further meaning on a level other than its own. Even if there were no precedents for it elsewhere in Keats's poetry, something very like allegory would have arisen in *The Fall* through the emphasis on the visible and the step-by-step succession of episodes which the dream circumstances entail.[9]

Although *The Fall* is not strictly an allegory, like many Romantic dream poems it must be read with a parallel, allegorical-style level as an interpretation of the literal.[10] Yet again just as Keats aligns himself with the tradition he also veers away, for Helen Phillips says of Medieval dream poetry:

> The genre is usually not really about dreams or visions as subjects; rather, the fictional device of the dream is a form which facilitates manipulation of a variety of literary structures: frames, juxtapositions, allegory, shifts between narrative levels, and so on.[11]

Yet this changes in the Romantic era, for Keats joins Coleridge and others in making dream and vision part of the subject of the dream poem.

Allegorically the garden in *The Fall* is a primary phase for the poet. It is the "Life of Sensations" (*KL* 1: 185), the "dumb enchantment" (1: 11) of dream. After feasting his senses on the paradisal beauty, fragrances and sounds, he turns to taste the fruits spread beneath the arbour. The banquet recalls that which Eve prepares for Adam and the angel Raphael in *Paradise Lost* before the fall: "By angel tasted, or our mother Eve" (1: 31). The remnants of that feast not only question the seemingly-

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[9] Chayes, "Dreamer, Poet, and Poem in *The Fall of Hyperion*," 504.
[10] Throughout this chapter I use the term allegory, but I use it to mean the allegorical-style of reading, not allegory in the strict sense.
[11] Phillips, "Chaucer and Dream Poetry," 7.

idyllic nature of dream, the state of imagining, they also represent the fact that Milton and other poets have been there first and have already gleaned and written of many of the fruits of the imagination. Nevertheless there is still "more plenty" (1: 35) and with great appetite he "ate deliciously" (1: 40).

However, it is not the feast that concerns this particular poem, but "a cool vessel of transparent juice" (1: 42) from which the narrator drank: "That full draught," he says, "is parent of my theme" (1: 46). Its lasting effects far outweigh those of the other delights on which he feasted, and they are forgotten. A Bloomian reading would see *Paradise Lost* as the full draught, the parent of his theme. The paradisal nectar, "Sipp'd by the wander'd bee" (1: 43) may be sweet, but it is compared to opium, potions and poison as it "rapt[s] unwillingly life away" (1: 51), recalling Keats's letter about Milton's influence on the writing of *The Fall*: "Life to him would be death to me" (*KL* 2: 212). Yet it is also a step away from the life of sensations. Among the sensual feast the narrator "struggled hard against / The domineering potion; but in vain: / The cloudy swoon came on, and down [he] sunk" (1: 53-55).

Just as the glass of nepenthe does in *The Triumph of Life*, the drink initiates the move to the next dream frame, the next phase of the poem. It is here, at the second dream frame, that the narrator falls asleep, "slumber'd" and, "When sense of life return'd, [...] started up / As if with wings" (1: 57-59). The frame appears a more concrete dream frame because he sleeps and starts up into another – a dream – world, rather than the more vague, but nonetheless dreamy, "Methought" (1: 19). It is as if the first frame takes him into a state that is closer to the level of reverie whereas the second takes him deeper into the dream state. Andrew Bennett is incorrect to say that

each frame "opens out" into the next;[12] the frames have rather a telescoping effect moving deeper into this internalized dreamscape. The first frame brings the reader closer to the subject but still includes a wider picture – the garden, fruit and juice; the second closes in directly on the juice as the parent of the theme, leaves the rest behind, and brings that specific subject into clearer focus.

In this dream within a dream the natural sensual pleasures are gone. The arbour and summer fruits have disappeared and the narrator finds himself in a massive stone and marble temple, also a familiar setting in Medieval dream poetry.[13] Where the grove and arbour exuded the warmth of the summer sun, the temple evokes cold hardness like "nature's rocks toil'd hard in waves and winds" (1: 69). There are sensual elements within the temple – "draperies" (1: 73), "linen" (1: 76), "Robes" (1: 79), "censer" (1: 79) and "holy jewelries" (1: 80) – but far from natural they are the paraphernalia of religious worship and their sensuality is mingled with the clang of metal – "golden tongs" (1: 79), "chafing dish" (1: 79) and "chains" (1: 80). The "Maian incense" (1: 103) is blissful (1: 104), but even so it is only compared to the "incense from all flowers" (1: 99) whereas the arbour had the true natural "blooms / Like floral-censers" (1: 26-27) themselves. The cold hardness of the temple reflects the status of the narrator's imaginative state as he moves from the life of sensations to one of thought in the temple.

Stuart Sperry writes of this change from the first to second setting:

> The change from the light and incense of the garden to the grim solemnity of the ancient sanctuary is vital to the sense of Keats's allegory. The change is that of moving from the realm of "Flora, and old Pan" to concern with "the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts," or

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[12] Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 155.
[13] See for example Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls* and *The House of Fame, The Riverside Chaucer.*

> from "the infant or thoughtless Chamber" to preoccupation with the "burden of the Mystery" (1, 280-81). It represents that growth from unthinking delight in pleasure to vision into the true nature and suffering of humanity that Keats, with "glorious fear," had eagerly anticipated from the outset of his career."[14]

Sperry is certainly correct about the allegory of the poem as a whole, the direction of the various stages, and in his reading of the garden. However, he confuses the second and third phases by blending them into one as Keats's letter of the "Mansion of Many Apartments" (*KL* 1: 280) and "Sleep and Poetry" had done. Keats often spoke of two states, as Sperry does, but in *The Fall* he separates them into three. In the second dream phase, that of the temple, Moneta does say that "None can usurp this height [...] / But those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest" (1: 147-49). However, in fact he has not yet suffered for humanity, at least within the poem. It is only in the third phase that he moves to vision and sympathizes with others – what Sperry calls the "suffering of humanity" or "the strife / Of human hearts."[15] The second phase is but a step in that direction, distantly paralleled with the beginning (though not all) of the "Chamber of Maiden Thought" (*KL* 1: 281), for it is here that he is concerned with the move from dreamer to poet.

In this massive "eternal domed monument" (1: 71) that recalls the pleasure-dome of "Kubla Khan" only to transform the vision, nothing lies to the north or south and "to eastward, [...] black gates / Were shut against the sunrise evermore" (1: 85-86) so that all things that begin new life with the dawn are unseen. In this place that has closed itself off from light, birth and renewal, it is only to the west, toward the setting sun and dusk, that the narrator sees an altar and shrine with "One minist'ring"

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[14] Stuart Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973) 321.
[15] Sperry, *Keats the Poet,* 321. Sperry quotes Keats "Sleep and Poetry" 124-25.

(1: 96) a "lofty sacrificial fire" (1: 102). The fire and its incense demonstrate the tensions of this phase, for though the temple is cold and hard, the altar is clouded with "soft smoke" (1: 105), though it is closed to the east, to the rising sun and renewal, the fire and incense are compared to the warm, sweet-smelling spring and its renewal:

> When in mid-May the sickening east wind
>
> Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
>
> Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,
>
> And fills the air with so much pleasant health
>
> That even the dying man forgets his shroud;
>
> Even so that lofty sacrificial fire,
>
> Sending forth Maian incense, spread around
>
> Forgetfulness of every thing but bliss (1: 97-104).

The passage contrasts with the "black gates / [that] Were shut against the sunrise evermore" (1: 85-86) and suggest that even this worship of the past cannot evade nature's cycles of progress, try as it might. Yet there is also contradiction hinging on "Even so" (1: 102) as if the sacrificial fire burns despite it being a time of renewal. Likewise it is the goddess of memory who ministers the incense that spreads "Forgetfulness of every thing but bliss" (1: 104). The line complicates Sperry's statement: this can only be a step towards carrying the "burden of the Mystery" (*KL* 1: 281), for here the attempt at escapism, as memory spreads forgetting, ensures this is still a stage of vexed dream for those who come here.

From the midst of the clouds of blissful scents, the would-be poet is challenged by "Language pronounc'd" (1: 107). This hard, impersonal description of the goddess's voice serves as a reminder of the poem's emphasis on spoken language. It recalls the verbal utterances of fanatic, savage and poet, as well as the poet's

command of language in the prologue. The language is as harsh as the description of it when the voice challenges the narrator to "ascend / These steps, [or] die on that marble where thou art" (1: 107-8). In this tyrannous, "fierce threat" (1: 120), the narrator is reminded of his mortality and that not a trace will be left of him unless he can achieve what is demanded – to climb the steps of immortality – before "these gummed leaves be burnt" (1: 116) and his limited time run out. It is an initiation, a first step from dreamer toward the status of poet.

As if to emphasize his current status as dreamer, he at once focuses on the sensations he experiences:

> I heard, I look'd: two senses both at once
>
> So fine, so subtle, felt the tyranny
>
> Of that fierce threat, and the hard task proposed.
>
> Prodigious seem'd the toil, the leaves were yet
>
> Burning [...] (1: 118-22).

While he lingers over what he is feeling and considers how difficult the task seems to him, his time is running out and the death he was warned about begins to set in:

> – when suddenly a palsied chill
>
> Struck from the paved level up my limbs,
>
> And was ascending quick to put cold grasp
>
> Upon those streams that pulse beside the throat (1: 122-25).

Even this chill of death he allows himself to feel for a moment as it moves quickly through his body from his feet up toward his throat where it would strangle the life from him. When he considers the cold grasp heading towards those two arteries

essential to life and considers the "constriction of voice"[16] that "Language pronounc'd" (1: 107) challenges him with, he shrieks, letting loose his voice so powerfully that it "Stung [his] own ears" (1: 127). As dreamer it is the sensations on which he focuses, rather than the task before him.

When the chill feeling registers, the narrator finally finds the strength to stop simply feeling and to do something about it. He "strove hard to escape / The numbness; strove to gain the lowest step" (1: 127-28). Yet even in the numbness, even while he strives, he concentrates on the sensations, or rather lack of them:

> the cold
>
> Grew stifling, suffocating, at the heart;
>
> And when I clasp'd my hands I felt them not.
>
> One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd
>
> The lowest stair; and as it touch'd, life seem'd
>
> To pour in at the toes (1: 129-34).

The fear of death, of the icy numbness, startles him into action and he gains the first step towards immortality. He has overcome the first obstacle in the process of becoming a poet: he has chosen to strive for achievement.

The shrine is "horned" (1: 137, 237), recalling Homer and Virgil's gates of horn(s)[17] through which true dreams fly, as well as the ancient temples where horns

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[16] I quote from Susan Wolfson, though it is worth noting that she says the narrator does suffer a "constriction of voice" while a closer reading shows that the chill was only heading towards his throat, not there yet, and his shriek proves his throat has not yet been constricted. Susan Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1986) 349.

[17] It is debatable whether Homer's and Virgil's gates are of horn or horns. See Anne Amory, "The Gates of Horn and Ivory," Yale Classical Studies 20 (1966): 3-57; and Ernest Leslie Highbarger, *The Gates of Dreams: An Archaeological Examination of Vergil, "Aeneid" VI. 893-9* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1940).

often adorned the altar.[18] Knowing that he has achieved, the narrator has the courage to address the priestess and ask,

> What am I that should be so sav'd from death?
>
> What am I that another death come not
>
> To choak my utterance sacrilegious here? (1: 138-40).

When he finds that he has "dated on / [his] doom" (1: 144-45), he asks the goddess of memory to let him forget the experience, to "purge off / Benign [his] mind's film" (1: 145-46). However, that would entail a return to his former state of ignorance and bliss. Evidently the incense spreading "Forgetfulness of every thing but bliss" (1: 104) does not work its magic on those who can ascend the stairs.

> "None can usurp this height," return'd that shade,
>
> "But those to whom the miseries of the world
>
> Are misery, and will not let them rest [...]" (1: 147-49).

Although it is only his own suffering, and not the miseries of the world or the "burden of the Mystery" (*KL* 1: 281) that the narrator has yet experienced, this is a first step and Moneta tells him not only can he not forget his suffering, but those who "usurp this height" (1: 147) are those who suffer all.

In the following sixty lines, the most widely discussed part of the poem, the role of the poet is distinguished from other roles through a series of arguments. The arguments can seem confusing, primarily because the reader has no omniscient knowledge and follows the narrator's confusion, but also because one does not expect the definition of dreamer to be one who suffers for humanity. Because a dreamer is often thought to be one who happily escapes the harsh realities of the world, the reader may follow the narrator in mistaking the distinction between a dreamer and a

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[18] See John Keats, *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook, Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 606 n294.

poet. Moneta names four different types of people: those who are ignorant and blissful, humanitarians who work for the good of mankind, dreamers who feel the suffering of the world but who do nothing to change it, and poets who pour out a balm upon it.

Readers may mistake, with the narrator, the test upon the steps as his achieving the status of poet, but in fact he is still a dreamer. Yet being a dreamer is the first step to becoming a poet, and it is in this that the narrator progresses. When the narrator fell asleep at line 57, he left the blissful ignorance of the life of sensations and started becoming a more imaginative rather than emotional dreamer where he still dwelt on sensations to an extent, but ones of suffering rather than bliss. His achievement to mount the stairs showed his will to be a poet, but he has not yet even felt the weight of the world, the "burden of the Mystery" (*KL* 1: 281), let alone poured out a balm upon it.

In the series of arguments in which Moneta defines dreamers and poets, she begins by answering the narrator's question, "What am I" (1: 138). Because he mounted the stairs he is one of "those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest" (1: 148-49) – a dreamer by her definition – and is opposed to those who find ignorance bliss:

> All else who find a haven in the world,
>
> Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
>
> If by a chance into this fane they come,
>
> Rot on the pavement where thou rotted'st half (1: 150-53).

The fact that he half rotted before summoning the strength and will to mount the steps shows that he had, until that point, still been partly one of this group. His longing to

have his mind purged of the memory of his suffering shows his longing to return to that state, but he has progressed to full dreamer and cannot return.

Not understanding his own status or Moneta's distinctions, the narrator wonders why he is the only one there and asks if there are no others who are also altruistic. Moneta attempts to quash his egotism by saying there are many but he is not one of them, for "They are no dreamers weak" (1: 162). They are humanitarians who "Labour for mortal good" (1: 159) and benefit humankind. He, however, is a "dreaming thing / A fever of [him]self" (1: 168-69) who "venoms all his days, / Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve" (1: 175-76), but who suffers for no purpose for he does not put it to good use – he does not use it to help humankind. Moneta tells him that it is recompense for his suffering that he and other dreamers are allowed into the garden and temple, the imagination, though his experience has been anything but blissful. This is because such dreamers are given the opportunity to become poets. Whether or not the narrator realizes this yet, he knows it is an honour and he "could weep for love of such award" (1: 185).

Lines 187 to 210 were likely intended to be cancelled,[19] but as they continue the same argument and distinctions, they are worth examining. When the lines are omitted the narrator either understands or at least accepts Moneta's terms and moves on. When they are included, he has not yet understood them and continues to question her on the subject. He has not yet understood that her definitions of him as dreamer are not those of a poet. He says he feels he is not a great poet, that he feels "as vultures feel / They are no birds when eagles are abroad" (1: 191-92), but just as vultures are still birds, the narrator believes that he is lesser but still a poet. Until now he has assumed that her charge against him was one against poets, but she agrees with

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[19] Richard Woodhouse made a note on the manuscript that "Keats seems to have intended to erase" the lines. See Sperry, *Keats the Poet*, 328.

him that "a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men" (1: 189-90) and the problem is that he is not of that category. As she has said before several times, he is a dreamer. What he has not realized is that

> The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
>
> Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
>
> The one pours out a balm upon the world,
>
> The other vexes it (1: 199-202).

The dreamer vexes it because he refuses to enjoy what he has and suffers all the wrongs of the world, but never works to put them right or to provide a balm for the sufferings of others. His suffering is in vain. The poet, however, is productive and his work can be shared.

Out of character the narrator explodes in an angry outburst of contempt, blaming "mock lyricists, large self worshippers, / And careless hectorers in proud bad verse" (1: 207-8) for his reputation as a dreamer. He still has not accepted that he is not yet a poet. The lines were likely cancelled because the narrator needs to seem to accept Moneta's terms before the narrative can continue. Lines 187 to 210, or at least 202 to 210, do little to further the argument. The distinction between poet and dreamer is helpful, but in truth Moneta has already explained the definition of a dreamer, and both were explained in the prologue. The tone of the outburst is out of place, however, and the poem loses little when at least it is omitted. Additionally, it makes the narrator appear unnecessarily stubborn for not understanding or accepting what his guide explains.

The narrative, which may continue from line 186, resumes the former reverent mood as the narrator asks the last of his questions:

> Majestic shadow, tell me where I am:

Whose altar this; for whom this incense curls:

What image this, whose face I cannot see,

For the broad marble knees; and who thou art,

Of accent feminine, so courteous (1: 211-215).

For the first time he is concerned with someone other than himself, concerned with the story of others rather than with his own status and that of poets. This is an important step towards truly becoming a poet, and he is duly rewarded. Moneta first tells him something of her story by directly answering the questions. However, this is not enough to prompt poetry and like a dreamer he is speechless:

I had no words to answer; for my tongue,

Useless, could find about its roofed home

No syllable of a fit majesty

To make rejoinder to Moneta's mourn (1: 228-31).

The narrator's silence is polite and Moneta appreciates it, yet it also demonstrates his inadequacy. He can only look around him, focusing on the fire, the floor, the altar with its horns of truth – everything but Moneta and her sorrow.

The narrator's experience with Moneta is bittersweet and full of tension. Her very first words to him are a challenge, with death as the consequence if he fails. Throughout the poet and the dreamer argument, she insults him several times telling him he is a dreamer weak (1: 162) and "less than" (1: 166) those who "Labour for mortal good" (1: 159). She calls him a "fever of [him]self" (1. 169) and tells him he "venoms all his days" (1: 175) and "vexes" the world (1: 202). As Walter Jackson Bate has pointed out, by using the Latin version of Mnemosyne he makes her an admonisher.[20] Despite this, however, the narrator continually thanks her, praises her,

[20] Bate, *John Keats*, 596.

is "Encourag'd by the sooth voice" (1: 155), feels "favored" (1: 182) and rejoices (1: 184). As Moneta prepares to show him the story of the fall of the Titans, the same tension exists. Moneta appears uncertain whether or not she wants to relive the pain by telling him. She wants to move on, and there is a tone of resignation when she says, "The sacrifice is done, but not the less / Will I be kind to thee for thy good will" (1: 241-42). She tells him it will give him no pain, though it will. The narrator has a longing to know the tale, but it is mixed with fear: "But yet I had a terror of her robes, / And chiefly of the veils, that from her brow / Hung pale" (1: 251-53). Her words may have been softened (1: 250), but her actions seem almost cruel as she discovers his terror and does the very thing that would scare him most:

> This saw that Goddess, and with sacred hand
>
> Parted the veils. Then saw I a wan face,
>
> Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
>
> By an immortal sickness which kills not;
>
> It works a constant change, which happy death
>
> Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
>
> To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
>
> The lily and the snow; and beyond these
>
> I must not think now, though I saw that face –
>
> But for her eyes I should have fled away (1: 255-64).

Parting the veils to reveal such horrors without warning, Moneta forces the narrator to confront his fears. She is not kind to him, though she gives him what he wants. He must, as dreamer and later as poet, suffer, and it would not be in his best interest to soften his pain.

While Moneta's outward appearance, like a nightmare life-in-death, is horrific, her shining eyes are portals that tell of another world inside of her. Though her face was "bright blanch'd / By an immortal sickness which kills not" (1: 257-58), a fearful sight, her eyes have a "benignant light" (1: 265) and a "splendor" (1: 269). Her brow is "sad" (1: 275) and the light from her eyes is "Soft mitigated by divinest lids" (1: 266). She seems not even to see the external world, but rather to live within her mind – her memory. The narrator does not back away in terror as he admits he might have done (1: 264), but rather empathizes and finds comfort in the light from her eyes:

> [her eyes] saw me not,
>
> But in blank splendor beam'd like the mild moon,
>
> Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
>
> What eyes are upward cast (1: 268-71).

The beams from her "planetary eyes" (1: 281) are kind and comforting, though likened to the cold moon, not the sun. Her memory is only a reflection of what has gone before. As the moon reflects the sun's light, so Moneta's memory will reflect a vision of the tragedy that is past.

The narrator's reaction is complex, as shown in the unusual metaphor:

> As I had found
>
> A grain of gold upon a mountain's side,
>
> And twing'd with avarice strain'd out my eyes
>
> To search its sullen entrails rich with ore (1: 271-74).

The light of Moneta's eyes is aligned with a grain of gold, but the narrator's own reaction is somewhat selfish, likened to avarice. Moneta's suffering is the narrator's treasure. It is with this mixture of empathy and selfish curiosity that the narrator

> [...] ached to see what things the hollow brain

Behind emwombed: what high tragedy

In the dark secret chambers of her skull

Was acting (1: 276-79).

The light has shown him a grain of the treasure he knows exists in her memory. The emphasis on the mind, the "chambers of her skull" (1: 278) is a reminder of the internalized landscape of the entire dream poem. It recalls the allegory Sperry, among others, mentions – the "chambers" in Keats's letter of the "Mansion of Many Apartments" (*KL* 1: 280). Allegorically the narrator is led into the next chamber of life as here at the third dream frame, Moneta leads him into the chamber of her memory.

The third level of dream is a vision. The narrator does not fall asleep, but rather there grows "A power within [him] of enormous ken, / To see as a God sees" (1: 303-4). Again the narrative does not "open out"[21] but in fact takes him in, deep within Moneta's brain where he can understand "the depth / Of things" (1: 304-5). Allegorically it takes him further into the landscape of his mind where, like Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*, he may understand what he subconsciously already knows.

At the third dream frame, Keats begins to incorporate the story of *Hyperion* and its "lofty theme" (1: 306). While keeping the overarching theme of poetic process through the first person narrative and by relating everything back to the narrator's experience of the vision, Keats begins to focus more on the themes of *Hyperion*: process, eternal mutability, cyclical nature and the inevitable decline of the old and rise of the new. Standing next to his guide like Dante and Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*, the old story unfolds before his eyes as he stands in the same shady vale watching the recently fallen Saturn and Thea.

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[21] Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience*, 155.

As the narrator watches the scene, Moneta narrates for him. She is the mother of the muses, foster mother of Apollo (1: 286), and she gives him the tale he will translate into poetry. He also hears first-hand Thea's voice as she speaks to Saturn, and later Saturn's. Through these vocal means and the vision he sees before him, the tale of Saturn's fall is told from an *in medias res* position, like *Hyperion*. All is hushed in a reverent silence for the tragedy except the "feeble" voices (1: 351) that are gentle, like gusts of a summer breeze (1: 372-78).

The narrator sympathizes with the old and feels pain for the fallen gods, but his narrative anticipates his allegiance for process and the new, for even in his reverent sympathy, much of his pain is an aching for change:

> A long awful time
> I look'd upon them; still they were the same;
> The frozen God still bending to the earth,
> And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet;
> Moneta silent. Without stay or prop
> But my own weak mortality, I bore
> The load of this eternal quietude,
> The unchanging gloom, and the three fixed shapes
> Ponderous upon my senses a whole moon.
> For by my burning brain I measured sure
> Her silver seasons shedded on the night,
> And every day by day methought I grew
> More gaunt and ghostly. Oftentimes I pray'd
> Intense, that death would take me from the vale
> And all its burthens. Gasping with despair

Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself (1: 384-99).

During this "long awful time" (1: 384) while he watches the fallen Saturn with Thea at his feet, he bears "The unchanging gloom" (1: 391) and gasps "with despair / Of change" (1: 398-99). While all else is still, time revolves constantly in this passage and he measures the movement of the moon's "seasons shedded on the night" (1: 394), "every day by day" (1: 395) and "hour after hour" (1: 399) against that stillness. Although he sympathizes, like Apollo in *Hyperion*, with the old, he will hail the new and the change they promise.

The emotions in the two speeches, those of Thea and Saturn, change from moment to moment to show the complications of the situation and the depth of feeling. In Thea's speech she begins, though "mourning" (1: 351), in anger and frustration. She reprimands Saturn for sleeping at such a time:

> Saturn! look up – [...]
>
> I have no comfort for thee, no – not one:
>
> I cannot cry, *Wherefore thus sleepest thou?* (1: 354-56).

Yet in the midst of this she contradicts herself and recognizes the little good it would do: "and for what, poor lost King?" (1: 354). She tells him to wake and relates what is happening to their "fallen house" (1: 363), and wonders how he could sleep at such a time when "unbelief has not a space to breathe" (1: 367). Yet she then turns round, recognizing the grief Saturn feels and the uselessness of trying to fight against it:

> Saturn, sleep on: – Me thoughtless, why should I
>
> Thus violate thy slumberous solitude?
>
> Why should I ope thy melancholy eyes?
>
> Saturn, sleep on, while at thy feet I weep (1: 368-71).

Thea moves from anger to pity and resignation, to excitement and frustration, back to pity and resignation, and finally to sorrow. The changing of emotions shows a depth of character, and places emphasis on the deep feeling with which the narrator has to sympathize.

In Saturn's speech likewise he moves through a variety of emotions. Grief pervades them all as he repeats "Moan, moan" throughout the passage. Yet he also moves from self-pity as he decries their fallen status to almost disbelief that nature continued as usual, to anger – "There is no death in all the universe, / No smell of death – there shall be death" (1: 423-24), to blaming Cybele – "for thy pernicious babes / Have chang'd a God into a shaking palsy" (1: 425-26). Saturn's moods undulate as he moves from anger and excitement to grief, pity and weakness. No sooner has he admitted his defeat than he calls out for war:

> for I have no strength left,
>
> Weak as the reed – weak – feeble as my voice –
>
> O, O, the pain, the pain of feebleness.
>
> Moan, moan; for still I thaw – or give me help:
>
> Throw down those imps and give me victory (1: 427-31).

The thought of victory moves him on to dreams of triumph and jubilation:

> Let me hear other groans, and trumpets blown
>
> Of triumph calm, and hymns of festival
>
> From the gold peaks of heaven's high piled clouds (1: 432-34).

Having moved through a tumult of different emotions, the dream of triumph moves him to follow Thea to find the others, while the narrator is left to take it all in.

Thoughout the vision there are reminders that it is a dream poem. "Methought" appears twice at lines 395 and 440, and Thea's "Me thoughtless" (1:

368) hints at the same effect through its similarity. At the end of the canto there is a more definite reminder as the third dream frame ends and the fourth begins. The end of the canto leads the reader on to the next even while the narrator must pause:

> – And she spake on,
>
> As ye may read who can unwearied pass
>
> Onward from the antichamber of this dream,
>
> Where even at the open doors awhile
>
> I must delay (1: 463-67).

While reminding the reader of the internalized dream landscape and suggesting a new dream frame, the "antichamber of this dream" (1: 465) also enforces the allegory as outlined by Stuart Sperry, quoted earlier, that the poem remodels Keats's idea of a "Mansion of Many Apartments" (*KL* 1: 280). The phrase recalls the earlier description of "the dark secret chambers of [Moneta's] skull" (1: 278). The narrator prepares to progress to the next stage, the next chamber. That he moves from an antechamber emphasizes the direction not as opening out,[22] but rather leading deeper into the dream.

The "antichamber of this dream" (1: 465) where the narrator watches and listens to Saturn and Thea is allegorically within his memory. The narrator openly says, "I must delay, and glean my memory / Of her high phrase" (1: 467-68). This poet's muse is not external: it is his own mind that shows him his subject, his own experience that is his inspiration. Moneta is an intriguing choice for a guide for several reasons. Her name and the Greek version used interchangeably (1: 331, 2: 50) in the same way Diana is used for Cynthia in *Endymion*[23] suggest that she represents

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[22] Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience,* 155.

[23] Because of such a precedent as the changing names in *Endymion*, it is highly unlikely that Keats's use of the Greek version twice is in error as Irene Chayes claims. Chayes, "Dreamer, Poet, and Poem in *The Fall of Hyperion,*" 504.

the dramatization of memory. She is his admonisher, his muse and his dream-vision guide as well, but it is significant for the allegory that she is also "Shade of Memory" (1: 282) because of the relationship of memory to reverie, waking dream, trance, dream and vision. Firstly it is a similarly imaginative state – being lost in a memory is very much like being lost in reverie. One thinks of Wordsworth's spots of time. But secondly, memory is also a part of each of the other states. The goddess of memory is an excellent active guide in a dream poem because even in sleeping dreams, the faculty of memory continues to function. It is evident that Keats recognized and wished to stress the importance of memory in dreams as well as in the creative process of writing poetry.

The beginning of canto two returns to the issue of language and its role in the poetic process broached in canto one and especially in the prologue. Moneta tells the narrator that she will translate her "sayings" (2: 2) into a human language from the otherwise incomprehensible sounds:

> "Mortal, that thou may'st understand aright,
>
> I humanize my sayings to thine ear,
>
> Making comparisons of earthly things;
>
> Or thou might'st better listen to the wind,
>
> Whose language is to thee a barren noise,
>
> Though it blows legend-laden through the trees (2: 1-6).

Like the "mingled measure" in "Kubla Khan" (1.1: 33), the poetry already exists in a different form. The Titan gods' language is "a barren noise" (2: 5) aligned with the wind (2: 4) and music (1: 350), and even Thea's earlier speech is translated (1: 349-53). Because Moneta, his muse, shows him the vision as well as translating it, the dream, like "Kubla Khan" is "as it were, given to him" ("Kubla Khan" 1.1: 512), and

he has only to transform it into poetry. That transformation, however, embodies the relationship of poetry and dreams and is the whole subject of exploration by Keats and many other Romantic poets of what is entailed in the creative process. Though he may have implied in the prologue that a poet is simply one who tells his dreams, that seemingly simple process is a main theme of the poem.

Moneta's role is complicated and intriguing. Not only does she show the scenes of the gods to the narrator, she translates the god-like language for him as well. That the narrator's memory and the memory of all things shows him a story – or *historia* – of times past and eternal is not surprising, yet it seems unusual that memory should translate language that otherwise is like the wind, "to thee a barren noise" (2: 5). Christophe Bode says,

> The truth of Moneta/Mnemosyne is not a linguistic truth. She shows him images which he must translate into language if he wants to prove himself a poet. As in *Hyperion*, the main subject here is change and transformation without an Oceanus to offer explanation. No oratory – only images that can be translated into language, for the reader to re-visualize. Undoubtedly, they are more powerful than Oceanus's speech, and more impressive than the dialogue between Moneta and the narrator. But they remain translations, in need of re-translation. To say that Apollo and the narrator in *The Fall* "read" in the face of Moneta/Mnemosyne is catachresis. *We* read what they see. This necessary metaphor constitutes the transformation of dream into poetry. The dream leaves a mind or consciousness in catachrestic

> translation – and in this form, as poetry, it becomes accessible, communicable, it can be shared.[24]

Bode is right that we read what they see and that this is metaphorically the transformation of dream into poetry, but he misses a very essential part of the metaphor and what constitutes that transformation. We read what they see, but also what they hear and what they speak. Moneta does not only show the narrator images for him to translate; there *is* an oratory: for Thea and Saturn speak, as does Moneta. Moneta's story – what Bode calls her "truth"[25] – *is* linguistic. Just as the narrator translates his dream into written poetry for the reader, so does Moneta translate her sayings – and, we are left to assume, the sayings of all the gods – to his ear (2: 2).

Memory is a vital part of communicating through language; not only does it store images, but it also stores the words that are given to those images and the thoughts that are connected with both in order to make sense of the images. It is logical, then, that Moneta is involved not only with the images but with the language as well. However, the fact that Moneta actually translates the language of the dream for the narrator who will in turn translate his dream into poetry also suggests that memory plays an active and very significant role in the creative process – a role that has been undervalued in some criticism. Keats has not chosen the imagination for his allegorical guide as we might expect; memory is the faculty with the active role.

Translating herself for him, Moneta tells the narrator of another scene. Here, too, Bode is wrong to say only that we read what they see, for they are still in the "dusk vale" (2: 50) when, in the first forty-nine lines of canto two, we read what Moneta is telling the narrator as she describes the palace of Hyperion in this time of turmoil. Their sorrow is, she tells him, "Too huge for mortal tongue, or pen of scribe"

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[24] Christophe Bode, "'Hyperion', *The Fall of Hyperion,* and Keats's Poetics," *The Wordsworth Circle* 31.1 (2000): 36.
[25] Bode, "'Hyperion', *The Fall of Hyperion,* and Keats's Poetics," 36.

(2: 9), so she proceeds rather to describe the atmosphere of the palace and the actions of Hyperion. The narrator, when he stands in clear light and sees the scene for himself, does the same. Thus the poem ends, unfinished, with description and action, having never fully addressed the sorrow nor having poured out a balm as it insisted poetry should do.

Yet this is not to say the poem fails – only that the narrator does not achieve his aim. *The Fall of Hyperion* has a more involved interaction between dream as content and form than any other Romantic poem except "Kubla Khan." This allows Keats to reveal as he represents the imaginative process in creativity. At the same time it is his response to the charge that a poet is a dreamer. Dream, he implies, is the idea, whereas poetry is the expression of it; dream is a state of mind, whereas poetry is its language. Anyone may be a dreamer, but, Keats insists, a poet is one who uses language to give the dream to future generations. The dream-framed poem is a written language that embodies within it the dream. The form has allowed him to demonstrate his regretful acknowledgement that progression is necessary – not only in terms of eternal mutability as did *Hyperion*, but also in terms of the progression from sensations to thought, from feeling to language, and from dream to poetry. For Keats, the dream-framed poem is certainly not "a less ambitious undertaking" because it is not in the epic form;[26] this form is, for him, the ideal representation for a crucial debate facing the Romantic poets – defining the relationship between poetry and dreams.

[26] McFarland, *The Masks of Keats*, 113.

Chapter Six

Shelley: *The Triumph of Life*

Like Keats, Shelley explored dreams throughout much of his poetry, from *Queen Mab* and *Alastor* to "Mont Blanc," *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound, The Mask of Anarchy* and *Adonais*, culminating in his last great poem, *The Triumph of Life.* Shelley follows the dream-vision form of Dante, Petrarch and Cicero to create a vision of life and eternity with a politically charged biting social commentary. *The Triumph* hovers between dream and nightmare, as its eerie beauty and grotesque masque haunt the vision with an atmospheric texture that mirrors its form. The poem situates itself in the liminal territory of dream, between memory and forgetting, between dream and vision, to explore the imaginative landscape and its role in understanding the nature of being.

The Triumph follows the tradition of dream poetry with its framing device. It is not an afternoon in May when the poet lies down on the hillside, however, but early morning at sunrise – the time when, according to the ancients, true dreams are dreamt. In using the frame, Shelley follows many predecessors including Dante whose *Divine Comedy* was commonly said to be a dream or vision[1] and Petrarch whose *Triumphs* follow Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* in their dream frames. Both works are major influences on the poem and it is likely that Shelley wished to align himself particularly with them even while his frame echoes the Medieval English tradition more closely. Both Dante and Petrarch only briefly mention falling asleep and having a dream, whereas Chaucer and Langland describe the poet's situation prior to the dream with considerably more detail.

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[1] See chapter one for a full explanation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a dream poem.

Shelley concentrates on describing the landscape surrounding the poet, and through it the atmosphere and mood as well, on the outside of the frame. He tells very little about the poet himself except that he had been awake all night with "thoughts which must remain untold" (21) – a line that deeply troubles the apparently carefree verse. Rather he focuses on the light imagery that is so vital in *The Triumph* and which reflects the mingling of opposites throughout the poem. The powerful opening places its emphasis on the radiance of the sun and on natural religious imagery while darker undertones hint to the reader that nothing is to be taken as lightly as it may seem. The first image is of the sun springing forth (2), "Swift as a spirit hastening" (1), and "Rejoicing in his splendour" (3). The light, easy "s" and "i" sounds give the opening a light-hearted and quick motion that seems cheerful and bright when aided by the heavenly connotations of "spirit" (1), "glory" (2), "good" (2), "Sun" (2), and "Rejoicing" (3). Yet the notion of the sun's "task" (1) and the apparent vanity of rejoicing in his own splendour "temper," as Shelley would say, or make less pure, the image. The sun, one of the major images of the poem, will later emerge to reinforce the darker undertones and alter the cheerful manner in which it may here be read, for the sun is the force that drives the daily routine of life as well as one of the bright lights that force the poet to wake, to see, and to understand.

Throughout Shelley's poetry waking is a positive action; sleepers are those who are oblivious to the truths of the world and who do not take action to change it, while those who wake know, understand and can act.[2] The same is true in *The Triumph of Life*, but Shelley's poet does not like what he sees and understands, and he

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[2] There are many examples throughout Shelley's works of which the following is a sample: *Queen Mab* 8: 3-9; "Mont Blanc" 86-91; *Laon and Cythna* 19-22, 260-61, 406-08, 1087-88, 1153-54, 1662-64, 1740-41, 2049-51, 2260, 2281-84, 3156-59, 4297-4302; "Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte" 7-10; *Lines Written Among Euganean Hills* 224-25; *Julian and Maddalo* 335-37; *Prometheus Unbound* 4: 57-67; "Ode to the West Wind" 5-10; "Ode to Liberty" 181; *The Cenci* 3.2: 5-8; *Epipsychidion* 308-09; *Hellas* 1-30.

wonders if ignorance is bliss or at least less horrific and disturbing. The final part of the first sentence, "the mask / Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth" (3-4), which could be, in an earlier Shelleyan poem, a moment of joy, is here contrary to the wishes of the poet who, against nature, wakes at night.

In the second sentence the pace slows significantly with longer "o" sounds rounded off by the peaceful and mediating "a"s, evoking an apparent atmosphere of calm and contentment with nature's beauty. A reader unaware of where the darker undertones are leading will no doubt see beauty in the scenery described – in the "mountain snows" (5), the "crimson clouds" (6) of sunrise, the songs of the ocean and the birds (7, 8) and in the delicate wildflowers. However, the undertones here begin to be more apparent. The imagery is decidedly religious: the mountain peaks shining above the red clouds are described as flaming (6) "altars" (5), the songs of the ocean and birds are religious hymns of worship – "orison" (7) and "matin lay" (8) sung "at the birth / Of light" (6-7), the flowers (a powerful metaphor), which are trembling as they awaken (9-10), swing

> [...] their censers in the element,
> With orient incense lit by the new ray
>
> Burned slow and inconsumably, and sent
> Their odorous sighs up to the smiling air (11-14).

"Continent / Isle, Ocean" (15-16) and all things mortal wake and

> Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear
>
> Their portion of the toil which he of old
> Took as his own and then imposed on them (18-20).

If the darker undertones have been until now subtle compared to the apparent happiness and contentment on the surface of the poem – a metaphor in itself for the human condition – the negativity comes through with full force in the toil imposed by their father, the sun, on nature and mankind. It recalls the "task" of line one and makes obvious the previously understated negativity. The reader becomes aware that this is a poem that will not depict the beauty of nature or life on earth, as it may have seemed with such a beginning, but rather a world whose beauty is marred with an inevitable and meaningless process, whose truth is stark and pointless.

What had seemed on the surface a calm and contented mood is replaced with an equally hushed disquiet as the poet is introduced with his troubled thoughts. Having been awake in the darkness he follows the stars, as they are now "laid asleep" (22) and he stretches out, under a tree on the steep of a mountain in a tellingly mortal position:

> [...] before me fled
> The night; behind me rose the day; the Deep
> Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head (26-28).

The lines echo *Faust* and persuade the reader that not only the position but also the troubled thoughts of the poet are deeply similar.[3] As Angela Leighton points out, Shelley's repetitive use of the "image of a tree perilously poised over a chasm is one which returns with the force of a self-definition in Shelley's works."[4] It is a precarious position, quite different from the hillsides of the traditional corn fields or

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[3] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, trans. Philip Wayne (London: Penguin, 1949) 66. The position of the sun is reversed, however: in *Faust* the lines read, "Before me day and, far behind, the night, / The heavens above me, and the waves below: / A lovely dream, but gone with set of sun." As noted in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 816n.

[4] Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 157.

pastures of Medieval dream poetry, in which the dreamer lies when his dream is introduced.

Stuart Sperry writes,

> We seem poised on the threshold of one more poem written in the familiar tradition of dream-vision. Yet the narrator assures us his state of mind is more like a trance than slumber because it proceeds from a sense of déjà vu [...].[5]

Sperry suggests that because the poet asserts that he was not asleep, the poem is not firmly rooted in the tradition of the form. However, as I have argued in chapter one, Medieval dream poetry does not follow exactly any precise series of events. In the Romantic period, dream poetry was often called a vision, as in Cary's translation of *The Divine Comedy* and in Charles Armitage Brown's description of Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* as a vision.[6] Though Shelley's poem may be a *waking* dream poem, it is still a dream poem, and as such takes part in the tradition by which it is inspired.

Shelley takes great pains to describe the precise nature of the state his poet enters. It "was not slumber" (30), but a "strange trance" (29) that, with a force that seems its own, "over my fancy grew" (29). The trance spreads a "shade" (30) over him that is "transparent" (31) and "As clear as when a veil of light is drawn / O'er evening hills they glimmer" (32-33), but although it is clear and filled with light, it is nevertheless something of a dreamy shade. Opposites mingle here as they often do in

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[5] Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988) 186.

[6] See chapters one and five. See also Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics,* 56 and Ralph Pite, *The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 1 about Cary's edition and Rollins, *The Keats Circle,* 2: 72 for Charles Armitage Brown's comment.

The Triumph to create an image that is neither perfectly one nor the other, but rather one "tempered" by the other.[7]

As the trance spreads a shade like a veil of light over the poet's fancy, he is still conscious enough to know where he is. The repetition of the scenery described outside and in the trance reinforces the earlier conviction that it "was not slumber" (30), for he still feels the "freshness of that dawn" (34) and "the same cold dew" (35), hears "*as there* / The birds, the fountains and the Ocean" (37-38; my emphasis) and knows he "sate as thus upon that slope of lawn / Under the self-same bough" (36-37). The tenses in this passage make it a difficult one: the entire poem, both inside and outside the frame is in the past tense, but the past perfect tense – "I had felt" (34) – attempts to separate them so that the past simple is in the trance and past perfect before the trance: "and I knew [in the trance] / That I had felt [before the trance] the freshness of that dawn, [in the trance] / ['Had' is implied here] Bathed [before the trance] in the same cold dew [as in the trance] my brow and hair / And ['had' again is implied] sate [before the trance] as thus [in the trance] upon that slope of lawn [in the trance] / ['Had sate' is implied] [before the trance] Under the self-same bough [as in the trance], and heard [in the trance] as there [before the trance] / The birds, the fountains and the Ocean hold / Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air" (33-39). The primary reason for what can seem a duplication of imagery is to impress upon the reader that within the trance he feels differently and understands things in a different light, as a shade like a veil of light spreads over him, but that he strangely still feels the same, knows he is the same person, and knows he is still sitting on a hillside at dawn. Though the two tenses separate the states in a way that makes the imagery seem duplicated, for the poet it never changes and this is precisely his point.

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[7] Shelley's use of the word "temper" in *The Triumph* at times means to "accommodate" or "adapt to" as well as "qualified" or "make less pure" so that it is the perfect word to express the natural balance achieved when opposites mingle.

Angela Leighton and Stuart Sperry refer to the poet's experience as "déjà vu." However, déjà vu is "An illusory feeling of having previously experienced a present situation"[8] at some time in the distant past. It is "a form of paramnesia"[9] because the original experience being remembered from a long time ago, just out of the reach of memory, never really occurred. Freud disputes the word "illusory" (only because to him unconscious phenomena are true experiences), but maintains that it is a false memory: "To put it briefly," he says, "the feeling of '*déjà vu*' corresponds to the recollection of an unconscious phantasy."[10] The poet's experience is similar in as far as it evokes an uncanny "feeling,"[11] but it is not a false memory of long ago – and so not déjà vu – since he *has* been there and *still is there.* Sperry is wrong to say (as quoted above) that "the narrator assures us his state of mind is more like a trance than slumber because it proceeds from a sense of déjà vu;"[12] the trance cannot *proceed* from what Sperry calls déjà vu because it happens first. Angela Leighton is also wrong to say that "what the poet sees in trance is *déjà vu*,"[13] as is Richard Cronin to say that the visionary "sees" "fresh green landscape" within the vision;[14] Shelley never writes that the poet *sees* the same scene as before the vision, but rather that he "knew" (33) it was there.[15] The passage does suggest a strange feeling, but it is one of a "strange trance" (29), a state of mind between reverie and dream, in which the

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[8] "Déjà vu," *The Oxford English Dictionary.*
[9] "Déjà vu," *The Oxford English Dictionary.*
[10] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. Alan Tyson, ed. Angela Richards, vol. 5, Penguin Freud Library (London: Penguin, 1991) 329.
[11] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Art and Literature: Jensen's* Gradiva, *Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works,* trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson, vol. 14, Penguin Freud Library (London: Penguin, 1990) 339-376.
[12] Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse,* 186.
[13] Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime,* 159.
[14] Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 204, 210. We are never told in the poem that the poet *sees* the green landscape in the vision and though he speaks of it at lines 67-71, when he describes where he is sitting it is on an old root and white grass – nothing there is green.
[15] Later in the poem Rousseau describes some people of the triumphal scene who played "upon the new / Embroidery of flowers that did enhance / The grassy vesture of the desert" (447-49), but we are never told that the poet sees it. The grass that he does see in the vision is white and is in fact Rousseau's hair (185-86).

poet is semi-conscious of where he is, not one of déjà vu. It locates the reader in a state of uncertainty as it suggests uncanny mental activity and the unknown capabilities of the mind and visionary experience. The repetition of the description, again repeated at line 67-71, is part of a complex series of echoes and of palimpsests continually evoked only to be rewritten, changed or replaced as one image links to another, as one state replaces the last, as each light is outshone by a different one, and on throughout the poem.

The "Vision [that] on my brain was rolled" (40) occurs when the poet is in the "strange trance" (29) just as a dream occurs in sleep. He feels that he is in a trance eleven lines before the vision appears, and that vision does not show itself in the landscape, but rather on his brain. Shelley distinguishes between trance and sleep, vision and dream, so that his poet is awake and not aligned with those who are thoughtless and inactive. Contrary to the charioteer whose eyes are banded (100) or "The sleepers in the oblivious valley" (539), the poet has vision, and unlike those in sleeping dreams, his trance is also, significantly, one of "wondrous thought" (41).[16]

For all of Shelley's specifying that the poet is not asleep but having, rather, a "waking dream" (42) in which he can think, he continues to remind the reader of the tradition in which he is working. As the poet begins to tell "the tenour of my waking dream" (42), he uses the word "Methought" (43) just as Keats did in his first level of dream when his poet finds himself in the garden in *The Fall of Hyperion*. Shelley uses this Medieval signal for a dream frame three times throughout the first half of the poem (ending when Rousseau picks up the narrative) in order to remind readers, like

[16] It is interesting how closely Moneta's warning in *The Fall of Hyperion* "My power, which [...] / Shall be to thee a wonder" "Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold, / Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not" (243-44; 247-48) fits with Shelley's use of the word "wondrous" here. This trance of wondrous thought must certainly be as painful as Keats's narrator's experience.

Bunyan does in *Pilgrim's Progress*,[17] that he is still recounting the dream.[18] In this way he does not allow the dream to crystallize into objective experience, but rather keeps the poem in a dreamscape where the subjective can be personified and thoughts envisioned.

Although within the trance the poet knew he was still sitting as before "upon that slope of lawn / Under the self-same bough" (36-37), in the waking dream the scene rolled on his brain is different and it seems to him that he is sitting "beside a public way" (43). As in Petrarch's *Triumphs* and Shelley's earlier *Mask of Anarchy*, there is a "great stream / Of people" (44-45) moving in a procession in front of the onlooking poet. All but the "sacred few" (128) – "Old age and youth, manhood and infancy" (52) – take part in the grand march of life, never hearing the fountains nor feeling the forest breeze (67, 69) until life leaves them behind and they die. With something of Dante's "terrible obscurity" that Hazlitt also believed "oppresses us in dreams" (*Hz* 2: 179), none of the people

> seemed to know
>
> Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
>
> He made one of the multitude (47-49).

These questions repeat themselves throughout the poem, but to no true avail and the obscurity, the unknowing, becomes more and more oppressive with the continual reminder that there is no answer.

In the midst of this nightmarish procession are the equally disturbing cold, garish, blinding light of the chariot, its ghastly resident "Shape" (87), its quadruple-

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[17] Bunyan reminds readers that he is still recounting a dream by continually repeating the phrase "I saw in my Dream." See for example pages 13, 17, and 19 in John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. G. B. Harrison, Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1954; rpt. 1978).

[18] Line 108 has the same effect without the use of the word "methought" when it says "I arose aghast, / Or seemed to rise, so mighty was the trance" (107-8), and, for a different reason, Rousseau uses "methinks" (302) where he could easily use "I think," which also serves to remind the reader through association that it is still a dream.

faced charioteer and team of wingèd "Shapes which drew it" (96). This triumphal car and its shapes appear more like a scene of death than life, shrouded in shadows (ex. 90) and "lightnings" (96), as they drive on rolling over, crushing, and mutilating those that fall behind. The light of the chariot is so intense it obscures the sun, which in turn obscures the stars. Sweet dreams brood far from here and contrast with the horrific scene of this vision. The entrance of the chariot upon the scene in the vision is likened to the young moon who bears "The ghost of her dead mother" (84), such was the "silent storm / Of its own rushing splendour" (86-87) (a term reminiscent of the sun's rejoicing (3)) and the "Shape" (87) within the car, who appears as one deformed by age. The scene follows Ezekiel, Revelation, Dante and Milton with the contrast that in this vision, the car is driven recklessly (105) by one who cannot see.[19]

Shelley's description of the chariot places him in a visionary tradition that enhances the effects of his dream vision. It is an apocalyptic and frightening vision that evokes the nightmare state in much the same way that a state of religious, mystical power might evoke the fear of God. The blinding light and dark shadows create an awe-full sight signifying a dark and evil, dreadful truth that one both longs to and fears to know. The noise of the beating wings (98) lost in a "silent storm" (86) though "heard alone on the air's soft stream" (97), seems eerily deafening as the chariot moves on with "solemn speed" (106). The contrasts of sound and silence, light and shadow, evoke an obscurity peculiar to dream states and uncanny or surreal sensations, creating an atmosphere that echoes its form.

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[19] See Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber, 196) 345-46 for a comparison of each including their emphasis on sight and Shelley's emphasis on the lack of it. See also Ezekiel 1. 1-28 and Revelation 4. 6-8 in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*; Dante, *Purgatorio*, 379-85; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 6: 826-866.

Around the chariot in what looked "like clouds upon the thunder-blast / The million with fierce song and maniac dance" rage around (109-11). Those in front appear like the frenzied followers of Dionysus:

Now swift, fierce and obscene,

The wild dance maddens in the van, and those

Who lead it, fleet as shadows on the green,

Outspeed the chariot and without repose

Mix with each other in tempestuous measure

To savage music.... Wilder as it grows,

They, tortured by the agonizing pleasure,

Convulsed and on the rapid whirlwinds spun

Of that fierce spirit, whose unholy leisure

Was soothed by mischief since the world begun,

Throw back their heads and loose their streaming hair,

And in their dance round her who dims the Sun

Maidens and youths fling their wild arms in air

As their feet twinkle (137-150).

These at the front of the pageant, drunk on life, race ahead in wild ecstasy, no less victims of it than those over whom the chariot has passed:

– Behind,

Old men, and women foully disarrayed

Shake their grey hair in the insulting wind,

Limp in the dance and strain with limbs decayed

To reach the car of light which leaves them still

Farther behind and deeper in the shade (164-69).

Youth and the aged, those who live life to the fullest and those who long to keep hold of it, all alike except the sacred few "of Athens and Jerusalem" (134) are captive to the conqueror. The descriptions of these million are of a diabolical possession, wild, mad, savage, foul and obscene.

The poet's visionary insight allows him to recognize the sadness of the "pageantry" and he is "Struck to the heart" (176) rather than wishing to join what seemed a "jubilee" (111). He does not need a guide to recognize that "all here [is] amiss" (179) – his vision is thus far perceptive. Yet he does not know why, and though in this respect he is the same as the multitude, his questioning sets him apart and the figure of Rousseau comes forward to guide him in his quest for understanding.

Rousseau's figure is as ghastly and wretched (181) as the rest: the poet had thought it "was an old root which grew / To strange distortion out of the hillside" (182-83), thought his hair was the white grass (185-86), and now realized that the eyeless creature "Was indeed one of that deluded crew" (184). This nightmarish figure from the pageant of life is described more like death with the skeletal root-like body, "thin discoloured hair" (186) and empty eye sockets so that Shelley even chooses Milton's phrase for Death in calling him, "the grim Feature" (190).[20] Indeed before the poet's memory, Rousseau had already "feared, loved, hated, suffered, did,

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[20] Milton, *Paradise Lost,* 10: 279. As noted in Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, 817n.

and died" (200) and allowed corruption to inherit much "Of what was once Rousseau" (204). He is now but a wearied corpse who still has a spirit, but one that is stained.

Rousseau's appearance is one of the most strikingly dream-like moments of the poem. The tree, of which the poet thought he was a root, was a part of the scenery at the very beginning and it now returns only to completely transform. There was no prior mention of the grass being white, but the poet at this instance believes that it has been so all along. He also "realizes" that what he thought was a root is really Rousseau in much the same way that the characters or scenery of dreams can transform and the dreamer adjusts his understanding to believe that he now knows what he previously misunderstood. The scene mutates in a way that only phantasmagoria can, and it is the poem's first indication that this is not only a nightmarish masquerade like *The Mask of Anarchy*, but an extraordinary piece of dreamscape writing as well.

Like the guide in Petrarch's *Triumphs*, Rousseau gives names to the faces of those in the hellish vision. As he names Napoleon, the poet reveals one of the primary themes of *The Triumph*:

> And much I grieved to think how power and will
> In opposition rule our mortal day –
>
> And why God made irreconcilable
> Good and the means of good (228-31).

The meaninglessness, the obscurity, and the inevitable tainting of good by evil are compounded by the constant fighting, constant striving and the inachievability of pure goodness. This is not to say that Shelley truly believes it to be completely impossible to achieve it to a certain level. If the poet learns from what Rousseau is teaching him,

he will see where others have erred and will understand how he can reconcile the evil with good and how he best can follow the good. Of "The wise, / 'The great, the unforgotten'" (208-9) Rousseau says,

> their lore
>
> 'Taught them not this – to know themselves; their might
> Could not repress the mutiny within,
> And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night
> 'Caught them ere evening' (211-15).

The lesson – know thyself – is contained within Rousseau's description of their errors and though it is after this that the poet despairs, the reader must guess that the poet will find hope, as did Dante in *The Divine Comedy,* in learning from the mistakes of others. Rousseau continues, as each of the figures pass, to outline their faults and weaknesses including his own and thus to teach his pupil through the experiences of others.

When the poet's eyes become "sick of this perpetual flow / Of people, and [his] heart of one sad thought" (298-99) he asks Rousseau,

> 'Whence camest thou and whither goest thou?
> How did thy course begin,' I said, 'and why? (296-97).

The repetition of the questions initiates a change of imaginative scenery framed with another dream. Rousseau tells the poet that in the midst of spring – "in the April prime" (308) – he had "found [himself] asleep" (311). The frame is traditional in specifying that it was spring, yet contrasts with the poet who, in keeping with tradition, lies under a tree on a hillside, however steep, for Rousseau was "Under a

mountain" (312). The phrase "found myself asleep" (311) also insinuates a certain level of consciousness that is peculiarly self-aware for a state of sleep. It implies that the state he was in prior to the sleep was either wholly unconscious or forgotten – the word "found" suggesting that he did exist before, but had since lost himself.

The place in which Rousseau finds himself asleep is the "valley of perpetual dream" (397), where a "sweet and deep [...] oblivious spell" (331) causes all to be forgotten but what is there. At first Rousseau is alone, conscious only of himself and the beauty of the valley. The atmosphere that the poem creates here is one of a sweet dream. The description of the surroundings is serene and picturesque, using such phrases as "gentle rivulet" (314), "water like clean air" (315), "calm sweep" (315), "soft grass" (316), "kept forever" (316), "sweet flowers" (317), "filled the grove / With sound" (317-18). The soft words and the hushed sound create a mood that almost rocks the reader to sleep. Yet it is the following lines that truly create the atmosphere of dream:

> [...] all who hear must needs forget
>
> 'All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love,
> Which they had known before that hour of rest:
> A sleeping mother then would dream not of
>
> 'The only child who died upon her breast
> At eventide, a king would mourn no more
> The crown of which his brow was dispossessed
>
> 'When the sun lingered o'er the Ocean floor

To gild his rival's new prosperity. –

Thou wouldst forget thus vainly to deplore

'Ills, which if ills, can find no cure from thee,

The thought of which no other sleep will quell

Nor other music blot from memory –

So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell (318-31).

These are lines of forgetting, of memory being erased. Rousseau does not simply depict a clean slate – a mind that has forgotten; he mentions and therefore recalls the sensations before he erases them. Like Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*, memory is here an essential part of defining the dream state, though it is rather as a contrast with the forgetting of dreams.

The "valley of perpetual dream" (397) is described with a gentle, beautiful texture that makes it seem ideal, yet it is not intended to be read as a state of perfection. Many commentators have noted the deep ambivalence in the fact that all is forgotten, the pleasure as well as the pain, the love as well as the hate, and that the poem does not suggest that forgetting the pain is even desirable. A mother will feel intense pain at the death of her only child, but to forget and not even dream of him is not a desirable cure. Likewise a king whose rival has overthrown him would not truly wish to simply forget. Though far more ambivalent for Shelley, the king's mourning for his crown is both natural and necessary. The lines cast a shadow of negativity on dream: it is not ideal; it is only escape.

The following lines, 327-31, are the guide's lesson to his pupil. Rousseau has given two examples – those of a mother and a king – and now he focuses on the poet

himself. A. C. Bradley is right to say that in some respects the lines recall the poet's "thoughts which must remain untold" (21). He says the lines "would naturally imply that Shelley has just been deploring in Rousseau's hearing ('thus') some ills of the past."[21] Rousseau does seem to know the poet's troubled mind, as Bradley goes on to suggest, and the lines could be paraphrased as "you would forget to deplore the ills that you thus vainly deplore, which, if they are ills at all, cannot be cured by you anyway." However, the word "thus" can also, though somewhat secondarily, be read as referring to the two previous examples. "Thou [the poet] wouldst forget thus vainly [as vainly as the mother and king would forget their troubles] to deplore / Ills" (327-28). In other words, the poet would, in this same way, forget to deplore ills, which is as negative as the childless mother without grief since deploring ills is an essential role of this poet as it should be of everyone. Through this secondary, darker reading, Rousseau notes the vain (in both senses of useless and selfish) escapism of the "valley of perpetual dream" (397). It is not just an undertone for the reader to notice, but an essential part of the lesson Rousseau is teaching. The qualification of ills ("which if ills" (328)) is also a part of Rousseau's lesson. He is teaching the poet to consider them in the light of the balanced world that Rousseau is trying to describe. Bradley is right when he says, "The words may imply a doubt on Shelley's own part about the ills that haunted him."[22] However, there is also a realization of the necessity of ills in these lines; Shelley realized not only that "so much ill seems to spring from what we once thought good,"[23] but also that what is good and natural springs from what we often believe is ill. It is this view of the necessity of balance that is contained in Rousseau's lesson.

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[21] A. C. Bradley, "Notes on Shelley's 'Triumph of Life,'" *Modern Language Review* 9.4 (1914): 453.
[22] Bradley, "Notes on Shelley's 'Triumph of Life,'" 453.
[23] Bradley, "Notes on Shelley's 'Triumph of Life,'" 453.

However, Bradley's comment on Shelley's "doubt"[24] is also in the same vein as Tilottama Rajan's belief that Shelley is unsure of what he is writing and that, for him, it is a poem of exploration in which he will discover his views as he writes. Rajan's chapter on *The Triumph of Life* in *Dark Interpreter* is entitled "Visionary and Questioner," and as such she explores the many ways in which questioning is an essential part of the poem. In most she is certainly correct – questioning is at the very heart of the poem. However Rajan extends her analysis to say that Shelley was himself unsure where the poem would lead. She says,

> In fact, Shelley is [...] deeply ambivalent about whether truth resides in the ideal or in the reality that desecrates it, and whether Rousseau's career is a victory of darkness over light or of knowledge over innocence and ignorance,[25]

but truth is very clearly in the "harsh world" (334) in which Rousseau "wake[s] to weep" (334), not in this vain dream or ideal. Rajan continues to argue,

> The verbal confusion indicates a deepening ambivalence on Shelley's part as to the truth-value of light and dark terms. It suggests that as he approaches his vision he is uncertain as to whether it has the status of a revelation of the way things are or a demonic parody of the way things should be.[26]

Rajan compounds Shelley's assertions of ambivalence, or rather balance, with an uncertainty she feels he is exhibiting in himself. She is not alone in believing that the difficulty of the poem arises from an uncertainty in Shelley. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. One of the most striking aspects of *The Triumph* is the

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[24] Bradley, "Notes on Shelley's 'Triumph of Life,'" 453.
[25] Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980) 65.
[26] Rajan, *Dark Interpreter,* 66.

masterly way in which the images Shelley employs and the vocabulary he chooses are able to speak in two ways at once. While one mood is prevalent, another is lurking in undertones causing doubt and questioning in the reader. The reader feels he is being manipulated; that his preconceptions are uncertain and that he is constantly given something only to have it swept from under his feet. The reader is in a skilfully manipulated constant state of uncertainty. The technique Shelley employs to achieve this effect recalls to some extent Hazlitt who often presents a strong argument on one side and then, before the reader has realized, he has turned it around and is saying what seems like quite the opposite only to discover that both arguments work together to achieve a balanced outcome.[27] Certainly, like most writers, Shelley's thoughts would become clearer as he wrote and revised, but there is no confusion or uncertainty on his part as to what he was trying to say. He did not know the answers to what he knew must remain unknown, but his writing has, as Abrams says, "the verve of a poet who has tapped new sources of creative strength"[28] in *The Triumph* when he forces the reader to question, to see the balance, and he has done it in a deliberately manipulative manner.

The negative spin of the escapist definition of dream continues with the ambiguous phrase, "can find no cure from thee" (328), which may be interpreted as the ills (if ills) cannot be cured by the poet at all because they are incurable and indeed necessary, or, alternatively, that if the poet were to enter the vain sleep, he could not deplore the ills and so not find a cure. The answer is probably both. The fact that this sleep is indeed vain and not a solution is enforced also through the harsh words "quell" (329) and "blot" (330) used to describe the result of the enchanting music, and more potently, "oblivious" (331). The word "oblivious" (331) (a very

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[27] See chapter one. See also Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty.*
[28] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 441.

significant word in *The Triumph*) is also used to describe the million in the nightmarish triumph – they are "The sleepers in the oblivious valley" (539) – and it is evident that this state is no better. Both are asleep (inactive and inattentive to reality), and both are completely oblivious to the truth. Nightmare and dream are, in this poem, equally opposed to waking.

And yet waking is not an easy solution either. Rousseau specifically mentions the previously suggested unconscious, lost state before he found himself, when he expresses the difficulty of waking:

> Whether my life had been before that sleep
> The Heaven which I imagine, or a Hell
>
> 'Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep,
> I know not (332-35).

The different places (or stages), two of which are mentioned here, have caused some confusion and it is worth dwelling upon them for clarity. Tilottama Rajan, for instance, believes that it is "the 'valley of perpetual dream' in which the Car of Life is seen and the 'realm without a name' from which the Shape all light issues,"[29] but in both counts she is wrong. The reader encounters the stages in the opposite order to which Rousseau experiences them. Rousseau's most distant stage of experience is one he cannot remember – his "life" (332) "before that sleep" (332), which he imagines as a "Heaven" (333). This is followed by the sleep in the "valley of perpetual dream" (397) that is an escape and a sweet, though vain, forgetting, and then by his somnambulism during which he sees the "shape all light" (352). He follows this with the experience of participating in the nightmare pageant, which is

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[29] Rajan, *Dark Interpreter,* 63.

still a form of sleep. Finally, he falls by the wayside (541) and only then "wake[s] to weep" (334) with *some*, though necessarily limited, knowledge, understanding and insight into a truth he had refused to see in the former dream states. "[T]his harsh world" (334) is the one from which he is speaking as a not at all omniscient, but certainly awakened, guide. It is in the "valley of perpetual dream" (397), which he has been describing and at line 335 continues to do so, that the "shape all light" (352) appears, or in Rajan's words "issues,"[30] not the "realm without a name" (396). Rousseau specifically says,

> "*If*, as it doth seem,
>
> Thou *comest from* the realm without a name
>
> ...
>
> "'*Into this* valley of perpetual dream (395-97; my emphasis).

She may have come from the "realm without a name" (396) – a world unknown to living mortals – but she appears to Rousseau in the valley where he was asleep and dreaming.

Shelley's own experiences of somnambulism will inevitably inform Rousseau's dreamy sleepwalking in the "valley of perpetual dream" (357). As Rousseau arises, his senses are in a daze, for he is not awake. In the manuscript Shelley had temporarily written "awakening for a space"[31] but Rousseau is in the "valley of perpetual dream" (357) and though it is day and he arises, thereby suggesting a change from the previous deep sleep, Shelley did not wish to depict Rousseau as awake. One's dreams may seem like awakening, but it is only in the "harsh world" (334), in reality, that Rousseau will awake. Though it is broad

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[30] Rajan, *Dark Interpreter*, 63.

[31] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts: A Facsimile Edition, with Full Transcriptions and Scholarly Apparatus*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, vol. 1, Garland Series (New York: Garland, 1986) 221.

daylight, Rousseau detects "a gentle trace / Of light[,] diviner than the common Sun / Sheds on the common Earth" (337-39), that the scene "seemed to keep" (336) from the Heaven he imagines before it. Mirroring lines 317-18, Rousseau again describes the sounds of the valley as "woven into one / Oblivious melody, confusing sense" (340-41). The initially delightful and tranquil, but confusing and uncertain state is perhaps Shelley's most effective depiction of dreaming. The dreamscape described is certainly one of the primary reasons that this scene is so memorable and so widely appreciated.

The pace is slow and the atmosphere is described with the detail of an observer who sees and feels the surroundings act upon his senses rather than one who actively participates in them. Beams of the morning sun flow (334) into the cavern, lighting it and "the waters of the well" (346) with a dream-like glow (346). The lighting in *The Triumph* is not only essential as symbolic imagery, but also as one of the key elements that create the atmospheres of the vastly different scenes. This light is "radiantly intense" (345) as is the "cold glare, intenser than the noon" (77) of the chariot, but the description is warm and glimmering rather than cold and glaring. It helps to create one of Shelley's most effective dreamscapes.

It is amidst the "Oblivious melody" (341) and waters "that glowed / Like gold" (346-47) that Rousseau sees "A shape all light" (352) standing on the "floor of the fountain" (351) flinging "Dew on the earth" (353) with one hand and holding "a crystal glass / Mantling with bright Nepenthe" (358-59) in the other. She assumes the role of "the Dawn" (353), which would itself normally give rise to waking, understanding and knowledge, but she is not the dawn, and Rousseau is not truly awake. In front of her, Iris, the rainbow, had formed and it is partly with this veil of colour that Rousseau first views the "shape all light" (352). The "fierce splendour"

(359) that "Fell from her" (360) recalls the sun who rejoices in his own splendour (3), but it is significant that it is a cavern in which she appears and shines her diviner light. The implications in a symbolic reading are that the imaginative ideal lights up the mind with what seems to be a trace of diviner light kept (336) from the Heaven Rousseau imagines before that sleep. Yet it must be remembered that it is not the dawn, true awakening. Dream is more divine, while what is other than dream may be, as Shelley says of poetry, "a feeble shadow of the original conceptions" (*Defence* 697), but dream is nevertheless confined to the mind and to live purely in it is escapism; it is not waking reality. Shelley's theme, like Keats's regretful acknowledgement that progression is necessary, recognizes the inevitable need to wake in this harsh world, however regrettable it may seem.

As the "shape all light" (352) glides along the river her feet do not break "the mirror of its billow" (362). Mirror imagery and repetition occur throughout *The Triumph* as they do in *Alastor* and other of Shelley's poetry. All of the main figures or images in *The Triumph* are linked with others through repetition: the sun, the stars, the car and its shape, and the "shape all light" (352) are each alike yet they obliterate, rewrite, and are obliterated and rewritten themselves (save the car) by one another; Rousseau experienced life before the poet and the poet echoes his experience, yet in the poem Rousseau's narrative echoes the poets. Even the language of the poem, as William Keach observes, repeats itself to the extent that Shelley writes that the "shape all light" (352) "stood / *Amid* the Sun, as he *amid* the *blaze*" (348-49; my emphasis) and that "the *phantom* of that early *form* / [...] *moved* upon its *motion*" (464-65; my emphasis).[32] Nothing seems to exist independently; everything is rewritten or erased. Here as the "shape all light" (352) walks on the mirror-like river she repeats the shape

[32] William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 107-08.

that Iris had taken only six lines earlier as she "did bend her / 'Head under the dark boughs, till like a willow / Her fair hair swept the bosom of the stream" (363-65). Yet she too will be obliterated in the light of the triumph and Iris will again resume her form (439-41).

Indeed even the poem rewrites in many ways Dante's *Purgatorio* Cantos 28-32. Shelley's poem is very different, particularly in the nature of the triumph, but all of the rewritings in *The Triumph of Life* do not echo exactly what they are repeating. The poem changes, rewrites and makes new what it echoes, and in this respect the influence of Dante's *Purgatorio* is part of *The Triumph's* repetitions. Much of the action and the language of the scene in which Rousseau tells of the "shape all light" (352) echo Dante's scenes of Matilda in the Earthly Paradise. One striking similarity of language appears in Shelley's translation of the scene: he uses the word "Tempered," which is, as has been mentioned, a significant and often chosen word in *The Triumph*.[33] Dante's enigmatic woman also appears by a Lethean river in a dark place with "perpetual shade which never lets sun or moon shine there,"[34] in the shadow of a mountain. She is shrouded in light, "love's beams," her footsteps are compared with dancing, and she is both a part of nature and an embodiment much like the "shape all light" (352).[35] Where Shelley's lady seems to walk on the stream, Dante's walks next to it, but will also seem to walk on it in Canto 31.[36] Both rivers are also compared to mirrors,[37] and Shelley's stream,

a gentle rivulet

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[33] See Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 313. It should be noted that the word is not only Shelley's translation. It is also chosen by John D. Sinclair in the Oxford edition, Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford UP, 1939; rpt. 1961) 365.
[34] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 367.
[35] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 367.
[36] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 407 as quoted below.
[37] *The Triumph of Life* 362; Dante, *Purgatorio*, 379.

Whose water like clean air in its calm sweep

'Bent the soft grass and kept forever wet

The stems of the sweet flowers, and filled the grove

With sounds which all who hear must needs forget

'All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love,

Which they had known before that hour of rest (314-20),

closely resembles Dante's

> stream which with its little waves bent leftwards the grass that sprang on its bank. All the waters that are purest here would seem to have some defilement in them beside that [...].
>
> With feet I stopped and with eyes passed over beyond the streamlet to look at the great variety of fresh-flowering boughs, and there appeared to me there, as appears of a sudden a thing that for wonder drives away every other thought, a lady [...].[38]

Shelley translated these lines on the lady as "even like a thing / Which suddenly for blank astonishment / Dissolves all other thought."[39] Though it is she who here, next to the description of the stream, causes forgetfulness, Dante's stream is Lethe and later in the canto it is described as having a sound which together with the grove has an effect on Dante: "'The water' I said 'and the sound of the forest contend in me with a recent belief in a thing I have heard contrary to this,'[40] and as a cause of forgetting: "it flows down with virtue which takes from men the memory of sin."[41]

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[38] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 365-66.
[39] Qtd. in Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible*, 314.
[40] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 369.
[41] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 371.

The "shape all light" (352), however, is a richer character who exceeds any influence Shelley may have taken from Matilda. As just one example Shelley seems to draw also from Dante's description of the spirits and the lights of heaven in the *Paradiso*, one of which reads:

> 'I see well how thou nestest in thine own light, and that thou drawest it from thine eyes, since it sparkles whenever thou smilest; but I know not who thou art, nor why, good spirit, thou hast thy rank in the sphere that is veiled to mortals in another's beams.'[42] I said this, directing myself to the radiance that had first spoken to me, and it then became far brighter than before. Like the sun, which itself conceals itself by excess of light when the heat has gnawed away the dense tempering vapours, so with increase of happiness the holy form hid itself from me within its own beams and thus all enclosed answered me [...].[43]

The "radiance" is not only nestled and hidden in its own light, but it is compared with the sun and its "excess of light," its sphere is "veiled to mortals" by another light, and it sparks questions in Dante similar to those of Rousseau. And yet Shelley's description does not stop there, for while Dante's radiance is divine, Shelley's "shape all light" (352) is only "diviner than the common Sun" (338) and the undertones suggest that neither is she "holy" nor free of "dense tempering vapours."[44] This passage is just one of many that no doubt helped to suggest the qualities that make up the "shape all light" (352), but again it is one that Shelley rewrites for his "shape all light" (352) does not exist in Heaven, but in the vain realm of dream.

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[42] The note in Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford UP, 1939; rpt. 1961) 82n reads "The planet Mercury, hidden in the light of the sun" and recalls Shelley's own obliterating of lights by brighter lights as the chariot the sun and he the stars.
[43] Dante, *Paradiso*, 81.
[44] Dante, *Paradiso*, 81.

There are many other similarities between Shelley's scene and that in the *Purgatorio*. While Shelley's lady offers Rousseau a glass of nepenthe to quench his thirst for knowledge and his touching "with faint lips the cup she raised" (404) leads to his brain becoming "as sand" (405) and his memory more than half erased, Matilda tells Dante that the river which here "is called Lethe and on the other side Eunoe [...] does not operate here or there unless it is first tasted"[45] and later

> She had brought me into the river up to the throat and, drawing me after her, was passing over the water light as a shuttle. [...] The fair lady opened her arms, clasped my head, and plunged me under, where I must swallow the water.[46]

Dante's language is as strong as is Shelley's for his "shape all light" (352), and it is even to this extent that the two scenes are intimately related, though with Dante's system the reader is in no doubt that Matilda is unequivocally good whereas with the "shape all light" (352) the strong language and dark undertones suggest a treacherous quality.

Yet while both scenes lead to the vision of a triumph, Shelley's is vastly different from Dante's. His rewriting attempts to erase Dante's text from his poem so that little within Beatrice's triumphal parade and car influences the triumph and car in Shelley's poem. Both are of the brightest light and are compared with lightning,[47] and both cars are described like those in Ezekiel and Revelation.[48] However, where the triumphal parade that accompanies Beatrice comes from Heaven, sings exaltations, and is peopled with angelic spirits, the triumph that the poet and Rousseau both witness seems to come from nowhere when the questions of both men are left

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[45] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 371.
[46] Dante, *Purgatorio*, 407.
[47] *The Triumph of Life* 96; Dante, *Purgatorio*, 377.
[48] See Ezekiel 1. 1-28 and Revelation 4. 6-8 in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version.*

unanswered and is peopled with forms more akin to Dante's *Inferno* than this, his *Purgatorio.* The striking difference after so many similarities enhances the nightmare-effect of the hellish parade and it is here that the erasure and rewriting of Dante is at its most effective.

Music is very much a part of Rousseau's experience of the "shape all light" (352). Just as the poet heard the "Ocean's orison" (7) and birds' "matin lay" (8) before his vision, and the music of the "ever-moving wings" (98) from the "Shapes" (96) that draw the chariot and "fierce song" (110) of the "million" (110) in the pageant, so does Rousseau hear the "sound" (318) and "music" (330) of the Lethean river and the "sounds" (340) of the valley. The sounds of the surrounding nature provide an additional sensation to the atmosphere of each scene with the effect of background music. The sweet song of the birds mingled with the calming effect of the ocean waves set the quiet, pensive mood of the first scene, the eerily hushed beating of wings amid the "fierce song" (110) creates a haunting, spine-chilling, frightful mood in the second, and the "sounds woven into one / Oblivious melody" (340-41) partly create the confused, dreamy "spell" (331) of the third. Here the atmosphere it evokes is hypnotic and charms the reader as Rousseau was charmed. The "invisible rain [that] forever seemed to sing" (354) and the "ceaseless song / 'Of leaves and winds and waves and birds and bees" (375-6) entrance to the point of oppression and threaten to never end. When the song does change Rousseau feels the need to assure the poet that the "measure new / [is] Yet sweet" (377-78). The atmosphere of this scene, its sensual nature as well as its oppressive uncertainty, is profoundly affected if not mainly created by the hypnotic music both of the sounds and of the poetry that describes them.

However, in Rousseau's account of the "shape all light" (352) music plays an integral role that does more than provide the atmosphere. It almost takes the place of description where earthly words fail. Music even describes the crystal light of the dew when the "shape all light" (352) is introduced:

'A shape all light, which with one hand did fling

Dew on the earth, as if she were the Dawn

Whose invisible rain forever seemed to sing

'A silver music on the mossy lawn (352-55).

There is no real sound in these lines – the silver music describes the sparkle of the dew, the singing rather an imaginary song. From line 364 to 383, every stanza mentions either musical sounds or dancing – "whispered with delight" (366), "wondrous music" (369), "dancing" (371), "ceaseless song" (375), "measure new / Yet sweet" (377-78), "sweet tune" (382) – as Rousseau describes the movements of the "shape all light" (352) along the stream. Some are used in comparison to her, others for the way in which she mingles with the music of nature. Music has here a magical, imaginative effect on the senses and is, with light, the nearest to the intangible nature of the otherworldly that the mortal Rousseau can find to describe the wonder of the "shape all light" (352).

Dream is another human experience that seems nearer to the otherworldly, and the lines that focus on the music surrounding the "shape all light" (352) also focus on the mind and on dream. Just as music and light are both cerebral experiences of perception that evoke emotion, so does dream weave together the imaginative and emotive in oneself. At line 367 Rousseau compares the almost floating movement of the "shape all light" (352) to the dreamy thoughts and emotions of one who is in love:

'As one enamoured is upborne in dream

O'er lily-paven lakes mid silver mist

To wondrous music, so this shape might seem

'Partly to tread the waves with feet which kissed

The dancing foam, partly to glide along

The airs that roughened the moist amethyst (367-72).

Partly daydream, partly an exhilarating emotion, dream here is used in much the same way as music to describe the nearly idyllic feeling of love.

However, the images of cerebral experience become far less ideal before the poem returns to broach dream from a different perspective. After careful descriptions of the gentle gliding, almost floating movements of the "shape all light" (352), it comes as a shock that the same feet

seemed as they moved, to blot

The thoughts of him who gazed on them, and soon

'All that was seemed as if it had been not,

As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath

Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought,

'Trampled its fires into the dust of death (383-88).

Rousseau's mind is unable to approach nearer to the higher state of being that the feeling of dream allows, and his mind, through incapability and failure, seems "Trampled" (388) "beneath / Her feet" (386-87). She seems to trample the fires of his mind in the same way that the sun puts out the light of the stars: "like day she came, /

Making the night a dream" (392-93). Dream, now but a lost hope, a memory, is no longer the feeling of love or a diviner state; it too is trampled and made obscure.

The dark undertones that appear throughout the description of the "shape all light" (352) culminate here and have sparked much debate for many years on whether she is a beneficent or malevolent figure. Yet like the rest of the poem the point is neither one nor the other, but rather balance, or one "tempered" by the other. The similarly strong language used by Dante to describe Matilda's bathing of him in the river of Lethe/Eunoe also seems somewhat malevolent,[49] but while she is a nearly divine figure, she is nonetheless a figure from purgatory, which is neither purely good nor evil, lying somewhere between Heaven and Hell. Likewise nothing in the *The Triumph of Life* is purely good or evil; each is tempered or balanced by the other and this is one of Shelley's main themes in the poem.

Repetition again recurs. When Rousseau asks the questions that haunt the poem, the "shape all light" (352) replies "Arise and quench thy thirst" (400) and though he had arisen at line 335 before he saw her, Rousseau now arises once more, only to bend (403), touch his lips to the glass,[50] and have memory more than half erased and stamped again. The third dream frame of the poem is quite different from the previous two and comes in the form of a strange and ambiguous comparison. There is no lying down on a hillside to dream, but rather rising to have a vision burst on his sight in and of "the sick day in which we wake to weep" (430). The nepenthe that the "shape all light" (352) offers to Rousseau should, in its proper function, cause

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[49] As has already been discussed above. See Dante, *Purgatorio*, 407.

[50] There has been, in the past, much debate on whether or not Rousseau actually drinks the nepenthe or just touches the cup. I believe it is most likely that "Touched with faint lips the cup" (404) insists on how little it takes to have a great effect, but that it also implies he did sip which is the cause of his great change of vision. However this can only be speculation and I have left the line to speak for itself in its own terms.

forgetfulness of pain and grief,[51] so that one wonders if Rousseau's account of the "valley of perpetual dream" (397) and the heaven he imagines before that sleep (332-33) is accurate or rather an affected account of a time he has now (when he is speaking to the poet) more than half forgotten. Rousseau compares his mind in the first altered state to sand where the footprints of deer are more than half erased but where those of the wolf who hunts them stamps his "visibly" (409). It is a state somewhere between the two visions in much the same way as the poet's trance at the beginning lies in the interim between full waking and vision. The comparison of the new vision in this extended metaphor is ambiguous. While the deer's tracks are said to be more than half erased and the wolf's stamped visibly "Until the second [wave] bursts" (410), Rousseau says, "so on my sight / Burst a new Vision never seen before" (410-11). It is not entirely clear whether the new vision is being compared to the sand with its presumably half erased wolf's tracks and its new imprint, or whether, as the repetition of "Burst" suggests, to the wave. By ambiguously aligning it with both, Shelley's implications are twofold: this vision both erases what comes before it – the deer tracks as well as the wolf's, the heaven before that sleep as well as the dream (an alignment that adds to the devious undertones of the "shape all light" (352)) and stamps its own imprint on his mind.

As the wave more than half erases the tracks, so does the new vision more than half obliterate the "shape all light" (352) with it's own "light's severe excess" (424). Again the "shape all light" (352) is aligned with sleep and dream while the new vision is aligned with the waking state. Rousseau's knowing that the "shape all light" (352) is still present is compared with, among other sensations, "the caress /

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[51] "Nepenthe," *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

That turned [The Brescian shepherd's] weary slumber to content" (422-23) as the "shape all light" (352) moves

'More dimly than a day-appearing dream,

The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep,

A light from Heaven whose half-extinguished beam

'Through the sick day in which we wake to weep

Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost (427-31).

The lines recall *Alastor* as much as Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode," both of which are concerned with dream. In this "harsh world" (334), this "sick day" (430), this reality, "we wake" (430) while she fades into obscurity. Just as in her appearance she had come "like day [...] / Making the night a dream" (392-93), so in her disappearance she herself becomes like a dream. Indeed in one sense, she is a dream, which by day, in reality, "Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost" (431).

With the "shape all light" (352) beside him, obscure and "silent as a ghost" (433), Rousseau focuses on the "new Vision, and its cold bright car" (434). His description of this vision is, like the last, suffused with music: the movements of the car across the forest are "With savage music, stunning music" (435); like the poet when he spoke of the same scene, Rousseau describes the "million" (437) as "loud" (437) and fierce (438); in metaphors and contrasts he speaks of "atomies that dance" (446), "exulting hymn" (456), "Lethean song" (463), "sweet notes" (478), "melody" (479) and "rhyme" (480). Music again helps to create the atmosphere, one that is more complex than in the same scene at the beginning of the poem.

Where the atmosphere had been extremely nightmarish in the poet's eyes, it is not quite as eerie and horrific here, but is "tempered" with emotions of awe and pity.

Though there is the "savage music" (435), the war-like triumphal march (436-37), and the "captives fettered" to the chariot (457) as before, Rousseau also tells of some who played on an "Embroidery of flowers that did enhance / The grassy vesture of the desert" (448-49), and others who "stood gazing" (451), provoking a sort of pathetic sympathy for them when they too "Fell into the same track at last and were / Borne onward" (459-60). The reader's pity deepens in the succeeding lines when Rousseau focuses on his own assimilation, an effect created by contrast with what he previously had:

> – I among the multitude
> Was swept; me sweetest flowers delayed not long,
> Me not the shadow nor the solitude,
>
> 'Me not the falling stream's Lethean song,
> Me, not the phantom of that early form
> Which moved upon its motion, – but among
>
> 'The thickest billows of the living storm
> I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime
> Of that cold light, whose airs too soon deform (460-68).

Dwelling on those sweet enjoyments (however treacherous) with nostalgia before contrasting them with his self-inflicted, bare-bosomed plunge into the "living storm" (466) and deforming "cold light" (468) creates pity in the reader for Rousseau's loss. The focus is on his own responsibility for his actions; by placing "Me" at the beginning of each phrase, he insists on his own power. Those delights were not strong enough to delay him long, and he changes his passive stance, "I among the

multitude / Was swept" (460-61), to the more personally responsible "I plunged" (467).

Before Rousseau's own plunge, his description of the scene evokes both pity and awe. However, when he joins the parade, the scene becomes far more hellish – "a wonder worthy of [Dante's] rhyme" (480). In contrast to the poet who saw the nightmarish nature of the scene from the beginning and understood that "all here is amiss" (179), Rousseau saw the car of cold light and the million in maniac dance and song, but did not see the full extent of the nightmare until he was a part of it. After his plunge, "the grove / 'Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers" (480-81) and he sees "phantoms" (482, 487), "forms" (483), "shadows" (488) and skeletons (500) cover the earth and fill the air with their ghastly shapes and noises. His descriptions become much more nightmarish and closer to those of the poet when he first encounters the same triumphal scene.

Rousseau begins to describe the shadows in terms of nasty, fearful, vulgar and distorted creatures. Their actions are compared to "vampire-bats" (484), "eaglets" (489), elves that dance in distorted shapes (490-91), "chattering," "restless apes" (493), "vultures" (497), "worms" (504), "falcons" (506), and "gnats and flies" (508). Some are cradled in the dead animal fur of "kingly mantles" (495-96), others make crowns their "nests" (498-500), and the skeletons "Sate hatching their bare brood under the shade / 'Of demon wings" (501-02). Though most are compared to birds or other flying creatures, none truly soar except the eaglets who are blinded by and "lost in the white blaze" (490). The descriptions are grotesque – even more so than Dante's *Inferno*, and are certainly worthy of his rhyme. Yet even still Rousseau's narrative cannot hold the awe-full tone of the poet's horror when he sees the triumph near the beginning of the poem. Though Rousseau was no doubt just as horror-struck and

disgusted when he first saw the grove grow dense with shadows, he is telling the poet long after he has wearied of the dance and fallen by the wayside. His description is nightmarish and charged with political angst, but he cannot describe retrospectively the scene without his present weariness and sense of pity pervading the tone. He ends the description of the shadows with a last group more piteous than the rest:

> 'And others like discoloured flakes of snow
> On fairest bosoms and the sunniest hair
> Fell, and were melted by the youthful glow
>
> 'Which they extinguished; for like tears, they were
> A veil to those from whose faint lids they rained
> In drops of sorrow (511-16).

The harsh, black, demonic descriptions fade and soften to discoloured white, extinguished glow, tears and sorrow, reminding the reader that almost all are here, not only those blackened to the core with the process of life. These may, unlike the rest, have soared, but now they only fall and melt (513). The mood alters completely from *Inferno*-like nightmare to disconsolate sorrow.

The lines that end the poem continue the tone, but oddly evoke a confused and ambivalent attitude to the hellish triumph. Though Rousseau has answered the poem's questions to the best of his knowledge and ability, the poet does not seem to accept it as the final word and he asks again, "Then, what is Life?" (544), challenging the narrative to fit into a larger, more rational explanation. As if to acknowledge that this is not all there is to life – that it is infinitely more complicated than could ever be explained – Rousseau looks on the hellish triumph with something of nostalgia and speaks a half-sentence about some who may be happy. The end of the sentence, had

Shelley lived to write it, would not have truly held the key to happiness; the tone is still disconsolate. However, what seems in many ways Rousseau's nostalgia for "the car which now had rolled / Onward" (545-46) gives the ending a more human element. He looks at the car as it leaves him behind, "as if that look must be the last" (546), the "must" insisting on a longing to hold on. If Rousseau's answer would have echoed Petrarch's *Triumph of Eternity,* which says, "Happy the souls that now are on the way, / Or will be soon, to reach the final goal,"[52] he would not truly have felt it as his senses are "tempered" with the longing for life. Hazlitt mocked the human sentimentality for life in his essay "On the Fear of Death," saying "To die is only to be as we were before we were born" and he wondered at the remorse and regret people feel. He believed "the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes, and idle fears, to sink to final repose again, and forget the troubled dream of life!" (*Hz* 6: 288-89). But however irrational, this longing for life, Shelley subtly suggests in Rousseau's final look at the car, is our human nature. It is just the way life is. The lines demonstrate beautifully the human ambivalence to the nature of life, and as such are an effective ending to this, Shelley's depiction of the troubled dream of life.

In *The Triumph of Life* Shelley emulates dreams to create one of the most effective Romantic dreamscapes. Dream is a part of the very fabric of the poetry. The haunting beauty of dreams and the horror of nightmares blend in the poem to create an affecting, surreal atmosphere. The poem explores the borders, the liminal spaces, between dream, vision and nightmare demonstrating the tempered, balanced nature of life. Shelley follows and makes new the dream-vision tradition in order to echo the tension he reveals between life as a dream-escape and a nightmare-reality.

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[52] As qtd. in Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience*, Macmillan Studies in Romanticism (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991) 242, as noted in Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, 818n.

Chapter Seven

De Quincey: "The Dream-Fugue"

Dreams play a vital role in many of De Quincey's major works; to tell, explain, and analyze his dreams is the central reason why, according to De Quincey, several of them were written at all. Of *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey says his purpose "was to reveal something of the grandeur which belongs *potentially* to human dreams" (15: 129), and he later marginalizes what he has written by repeating the claim:

> But from this I now pass to what is the main subject of these latter Confessions – to the history and journal of what took place in my dreams; for these were the immediate and proximate cause of shadowy terrors that settled and brooded over my whole waking life (2: 255).[1]

To De Quincey the long stories, the confessions, of his life were but an introduction to the dreams he would tell in a matter of paragraphs. He felt dreams to be central to his existence, his sense of self, though ironically the context for the dreams takes over and becomes a work of its own connected to but not dependent upon the dreams, which themselves become much less central.

"The Dream-Fugue" provides another example of this. The entirety of "The English Mail-Coach," he explains, was written as an introduction to "The Dream-Fugue":

> The reader is to understand this present paper, in its two sections of *The Vision*, &c., and *The Dream-Fugue*, as connected with a previous paper on *The English Mail-Coach* [...]. The ultimate object was the Dream-Fugue (16: 430).

[1] See also 2: 65 for the 1822 edition.

The lengthy "English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of Motion," its subsection "Going Down with Victory," and the lengthy "Vision of Sudden Death," all originally intended to be part of *Suspiria de Profundis*, are merely context, according to De Quincey, leading up to, in order to explain, the comparatively short five variations of "The Dream-Fugue," which itself has an introduction. While "The English Mail-Coach" is considered an important work of De Quincey's and many critics give thorough readings of it, few comment with any depth or detail on "The Dream-Fugue." Although the contexts become works in their own right, far more than an introductory explanation of the dream sequence, "The Dream-Fugue" is De Quincey's reason for writing here and should be acknowledged as an integral part of "The English Mail-Coach" and of De Quincey's dream writing.

De Quincey often claims to have written dream prose for psychological interest. He wished to demonstrate a relationship between waking and dreaming experience and to explore the association between memory and dreams. He thus invites psychoanalytic approaches and almost insists that parallels are drawn between the waking and dreaming experiences as outlined in his work. This creates a difficulty for critics in that many, to at least some extent, accept the dream-text as an account of the author's own dream and read it in terms of its implications on the author. Michael Haltresht's "The Meaning of De Quincey's 'Dream-Fugue on ... Sudden Death'" is just one of many examples in which the critic reads the prose in terms of autobiographical details obtained from works outside "The English Mail-Coach." Haltresht uses psychoanalysis and comes to three conclusions:

> On the surface, then, the vision is a typical post-traumatic dream that through sheer repetition, plus the provision of a happy ending, seeks to

help De Quincey's battered ego to cope with the shock of the accident on the road.

But that is not all, or the nightmare would not have haunted De Quincey for forty years. At a second level, the accident, so terrifying because of its utter suddenness and De Quincey's opium-induced paralysis, must have become for this sensitive man a paradigm for

> human helplessness and sense of betrayal in the face of any form of suffering disaster, much as the wreck of the *Titanic* was for a later generation.

And lastly he finds that on a "third level,"

> the female figure represents, not suffering humanity in general, but, more specifically, all those women whom De Quincey felt he ruined by his very passivity; that is, by his drug addiction.[2]

Thomas McFarland, Angela Leighton and Edward Sackville West,[3] among many others, see the female figure as specifically representing De Quincey's sister Elizabeth, Wordsworth's daughter Kate, or Ann from *The Confessions* rather than looking beyond these partly to what each of them and all women and children represented to him, and more importantly to what the text of "The English Mail-Coach" itself suggests: innocence, ideals, the beautiful and the fragile, the exotic and the oriental, otherness, liberty, and a vulnerable Britannia. Although De Quincey is partly to blame for inviting personal psychoanalysis, such readings can be dangerously misleading. "The Dream-Fugue" is not an experiment to allow

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[2] Haltresht, "The Meaning of De Quincey's 'Dream-Fugue on ... Sudden Death,'" 31, 32.
[3] Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Angela Leighton, "De Quincey and Women," *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832*, ed. Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992); Edward Sackville West, *A Flame in Sunlight: The Life and Work of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Cassell, 1936).

psychological analysis or analysis of his personal history; it is a difficult, creative work of literature that attempts to justify the ways of God to men, to justify the existence of both good and evil, to justify sin and death in a God-made world, to justify the idea that "Carnage is [God's] daughter,"[4] to justify the good and evil of the Napoleonic wars in particular, and it is as such that it must be read.

This problem of invited psychoanalysis is exacerbated by the autobiographical style, which makes it difficult to separate De Quincey from a fictional narrator and which continually insists that they should be considered as one. In the headnote to "The Vision of Sudden Death" and "The Dream-Fugue," for instance, De Quincey writes: "The Vision of Sudden Death contains the mail-coach incident, which did really occur, and did really suggest the variations of the Dream, here taken up by the Fugue, as well as other variations not now recorded" (16: 430). In the same way as the preface to "Kubla Khan," the author insists that the text should be considered as a record of a real dream and in the terms that he specifies.

However, it is highly unlikely that "The Dream-Fugue" even resembles an actual dream that De Quincey ever had. Like "Kubla Khan" it may be based on some sort of dream, but its artistic ingenuity quickly reveals its premeditated and calculated nature. It is rather the collective anxieties of contemporary Britain and the private anxieties of an individual who forms a part of the society into which the prose poem delves. The piece does not, as psychoanalytical critics claim, lay bare the workings of De Quincey's dreaming mind; it is, according to De Quincey, "an attempt to wrestle with the utmost efforts of music in dealing with a colossal form of impassioned horror" (16: 430). By using the dream form in literature, De Quincey is able to explore the tensions of a time of social and political upheaval in an effort to deal with

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[4] The quotation is from Wordsworth's "Ode 1815" and is quoted by De Quincey in his 1848 essay "War" (16: 279), which shares one of its themes with "The Dream-Fugue."

extreme emotions and bring the traumatic experiences to a point of understanding, acceptance and resolution.

The dream form is effective for De Quincey because of the way it allows him to play out public and private anxieties about Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, to display conflicts of emotions that are not easily rationalized, and to allow readers to see and feel the conflict in a highly imaginative, highly impassioned form so that they may better understand the balance of its resolution. Yet it also presents a highly imaginative space that is well suited to themes with vague borderlands and topics that may not sit comfortably in a more prosaic form. In "The Dream-Fugue" De Quincey builds up his text to the point that it takes his readers to the edge of an imaginative abyss so that they may peer into unknown potential like the woman of "The Vision of Sudden Death." De Quincey also uses the form as a protective mask. He was not adverse to stating his opinions frankly and laying himself open to criticism, but when revealing such powerful emotions and opinions, it could not but help that he was able to hide behind the excuse, as he does for any literary faults, that "The Dream is a law to itself: and as well quarrel with a rainbow for showing, or for *not* showing, a secondary arch. [...] But the Dream knows best; and the Dream, I say again, is the responsible party" (20: 35).

Whereas *The Fall of Hyperion* and *The Triumph of Life* never seek to delude the reader into believing that Keats or Shelley ever had sleeping dreams of the kind, De Quincey follows Coleridge, not only in insisting that he did dream the sequence that he writes, but also in emulating through "The Dream-Fugue" the qualities of sleeping dreams. De Quincey uses several techniques to emulate dreams, and it is the combination of these and a very atmospheric, "impassioned" style of writing that make "The Dream-Fugue" such an effective piece of dream writing.

The sequence of dream variations is also similar to "Kubla Khan" because it too invites symbolic interpretation. Robert Hopkins notes that this is also similar to the French symbolists:

> The characteristics that Edmund Wilson found in the French Symbolists – the attempt to intimate things rather than state them plainly, the attempt of the poet to invent a special language capable of expressing his feelings, the attempt to communicate only by symbols conveyed by a succession of words and images that merely suggest, and the tendency to endow verbal images with "an abstract value like musical notes and chords" – may all equally apply to *The English Mail-Coach*, with the qualification that De Quincey is exploiting through the dream states of his narrators a set of public, conventional apocalyptic symbols.[5]

The strange and seemingly profound language insists there is more to the narrative than its literal meaning. There is a sense that something haunts the texts and lies below the surface disturbing the piece, which makes the reader feel it is there without any specific mention of it. This is a technique through which De Quincey emulates dreams, for often people feel that a dream may be able to communicate something more significant than a random series of events. Dreams can seem interpretable (as Artemidorus and Freud believed) and may seem to speak with a language of their own (as Coleridge believed) that one only needs to learn in order to understand the message of the dream.[6]

"The Dream-Fugue" does not follow any one specific allegory, and its symbols each invoke more than one idea, none of which are perfectly consistent

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[5] Robert Hopkins, "De Quincey on War and the Pastoral Design of *The English Mail-Coach*," *Studies in Romanticism* 63 (1967): 148. His quotation is from *Axel's Castle* (New York, 1931) 21.
[6] See chapters two and three respectively for further explanation.

throughout the piece. It is the power of suggestion that De Quincey is expertly manipulating, where the complexity of the symbolic reading creates a prose piece that suggests to the reader's mind far more than could be said in allegory. It is similar to his theory of "*involutes*" (15: 142), which he describes in *Suspiria de Profundis* when he says,

> that far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, pass to us as *involutes* (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us *directly*, and in their own abstract shapes" (15: 142).

Part of the complexity of "The Dream-Fugue" is that the short scenes are so charged with power and emotion, and this together with their careful descriptions and familiar but not overly specific symbols, creates for the reader just such compound experiences.

In this, "The Dream-Fugue" emulates both dreams and fugues. De Quincey's literary dreams and visions are very much like Wordsworth's spots of time. They are often, as in the dream of Ann on Easter Sunday in *The Confessions* (2: 72-73), the vision when with Elizabeth on her deathbed (15: 142-44), and the dream of the dying Elizabeth in *Suspiria* (15: 169-70), slowed or still scenes that through great detail and often with atmospheric lighting create a strong, emotional response in the reader. They are the scenes that we never forget. Dreams, being almost completely non-verbal scenes, rely on visual effects to communicate, and De Quincey's literary dreams emulate this technique. Likewise, fugues involve strains of music twisted together so decisively they rely on one another to create the whole. They too are "compound experiences incapable of being disentangled" (15: 142) that communicate

far more together than the individual strands ever could. "The Dream-Fugue" communicates much like dreams and fugues – even though it relies on words where the other two do not – through compound symbolism and scenic imagery like De Quincey's theory of involutes.

Many of the themes, as well as the imagery, of "The Dream-Fugue" are first introduced in the earlier sections of "The English Mail-Coach." Indeed De Quincey insists that "*every* element in the shifting movements of the Dream derived itself either primarily from the incidents of the actual scene, or from secondary features associated with the mail" (20: 35; my emphasis). At times when "The Dream-Fugue" seems particularly obscure, interpretation and understanding are made easier when one reflects on the work as a whole. De Quincey's preface in his 1854 *Selections Grave and Gay* touches on a few of the themes as he attempts to explain the connection between the various parts of the entire work:

> What I had beheld from my seat upon the mail; the scenical strife of action and passion, of anguish and fear, as I had there witnessed them moving in ghostly silence; this duel between life and death narrowing itself to a point of such exquisite evanescence as the collision neared; all these elements of the scene blended, under the law of association, with the previous and permanent features of distinction investing the mail itself: which features at that time lay – 1st, in velocity unprecedented; 2dly, in the power and beauty of the horses; 3dly, in the official connection with the government of a great nation; and 4thly, in the function, almost a consecrated function, of publishing and diffusing through the land the great political events, and especially the great battles during a conflict of unparalleled grandeur. These

> honorary distinctions are all described circumstantially in the FIRST or introductory section ('The Glory of Motion'). The three first were distinctions maintained at all times; but the fourth and grandest belonged exclusively to the war with Napoleon; and this it was which most naturally introduced Waterloo into the dream (20: 34-35).

De Quincey hints at a few of the important themes – the "strife of action and passion, of anguish and fear," the "dual between life and death," velocity, power, beauty, patriotism, and the grandeur of war and victory. Yet these are only hints, many of which only slightly suggest much more powerful themes that lie behind them.

The "velocity unprecedented (20: 34)," for example, is a deeply equivocal statement because while De Quincey celebrates the excitement of their speed, he also emphasizes the destructive power of that speed when he describes the toppled egg cart at the market and when he shows the coach's responsibility in the collision. Additionally, De Quincey writes of his disdain for the railroad that has a greater velocity than the mail-coach. Although velocity is a theme, progress, or rather nostalgia for the grandeur and beauty of the past that was being replaced (as he saw it) by the, perhaps more practical, but far less beautiful and grand products of the industrial and political revolutions, is the more relevant theme underlying it. The fact that the driver of the mail-coach in "The Vision of Sudden Death" has fallen asleep and that the coach is racing at top speed, completely out of control, insists on the complexity of De Quincey's seemingly simple, straight-forward statement that one theme is "velocity unprecedented" (20: 34).

While the work certainly does deal with the themes that De Quincey mentions, as it does deal with the fragility of life and trauma of death suggested by the collision, the work also presents a semi-allegory of the political and historical climate of Britain

and Europe from 1789 to 1849, brought to the forefront of public concern, and probably a catalyst for De Quincey, by the European revolutions of 1848. Each subsequent section of "The English Mail-Coach" leads deeper into the public and private subconscious as it was affected by both the excitement and the troubling nature of contemporary events. The prose form enables De Quincey to link the various parts in a coherent whole, while manipulating the tone of each level so that the piece becomes more and more profound as it nears the heart of the themes at its climax. Because it is prose, De Quincey is able to move from the conversational to the serious to the profound, pushing the limits of the prose style and challenging our very notion of poetry, just as dreams push the limits of the mind and challenge our notions of reality and imagination. "The Glory of Motion" begins by light-heartedly introducing many of the themes – the class system and snobbery of those who sit inside the coach towards the young men from Oxford who sit on the box, for example. "Going Down with Victory" is a more serious piece dealing with the grandeur of the war, patriotism, and the excitement of victory while also dealing with the bloodshed and the inevitable loss of human life that comes with it. The tone changes again in the next piece, "The Vision of Sudden Death," which is what De Quincey called "impassioned prose." Although it appears to be unconnected with contemporary issues – taking place at night on a lonely road – the emotions that it deals with are similar and attempt to bring the public subconscious into the realm of the private. From an "impassioned prose" "Vision," "The English Mail-Coach" then moves to the even more highly "impassioned prose" of a "Dream" in "The Dream-Fugue," in which De Quincey is able to deal with the emotions and issues of the rest in a way that allows the tensions to battle with each other as, through each successive variation, the narrative continues to move deeper towards the heart of the emotions at the core

of the dreaming mind, until it reaches a final resolution on the issues and emotions that connect the entirety of "The English Mail-Coach."

"The Dream-Fugue" begins with two "musical frames." The first is a quotation from *Paradise Lost* on the music that Adam hears when Michael shows him the vision of things to come. It is a quotation that is appropriate not only in its description of someone playing a fugue,

> 'Whence the sound
>
> Of instruments, that made melodious chime,
>
> Was heard, of harp and organ; and who mov'd
>
> Their stops and chords, was seen; his volant touch
>
> Instinct through all proportions, low and high,
>
> Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue' (16: 442),[7]

but also in its fallen nature. This is music that Adam believes is beautiful and joyful, that seems to him a part of God's good world, but Michael informs him that those who play it and dance to it are the sons and daughters of Cain, that it is used for evil means, and that their enjoyment is selfish and unholy. This is a scene that leaves Adam and the reader uneasy, and it is one that, as an inscription to De Quincey's piece, introduces the theme of justifying the existence of sin in a God-made world. Secondly, in "The Dream-Fugue," there appears the heading "*Tumultuosissimamente*" (16: 443), which, as Calvin S. Brown and Frederick Burwick point out, is a musical direction much like Jean Paul Richter's "*pianissimo*" in *Der Traum Viktor*.[8] Together these paratexts initiate the musical form. They are, in a sense, the musical frames; in

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[7] Cf: Milton, *Paradise Lost,* 11: 558-63.

[8] Frederick Burwick, "The Dream-Visions of Jean Paul and De Quincey." *Comparative Literature* 20.1 (1968): 25; Calvin S. Brown, "The Musical Structure of De Quincey's *Dream-Fugue* (1938)," *Musico-Poetics in Perspective: Calvin S. Brown in Memoriam,* ed. Jean-Louis Cupers and Ulrich Weisstein, Word and Music Studies 2 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 137.

the same way as do dream frames, they suggest to the reader that the piece should be read with attention to musical form.

Music plays a significant role not only in providing the dreamy and at times nightmarish atmosphere. De Quincey wrote that the object of "The Dream-Fugue" was "an attempt to wrestle with the utmost efforts of music in dealing with a colossal form of impassioned horror" (16: 430).[9] By music, it is likely that he means poetry as well as song, the sound of his words as well as the sounds of which he speaks. His prose, he feels, is an attempt to come to terms with the themes of the work through its music.

Calvin S. Brown, an innovator in musico-poetics, wrote an essay in 1938 on "The Musical Structure of De Quincey's *Dream-Fugue*" where he attempts to explain how De Quincey's piece fits the musical structure of a fugue.[10] Where De Quincey varies from tradition, Brown attempts to justify the decisions, but admits that he cannot understand the large amount of unstructured writing or the introduction of a trumpet in the fourth variation. He also asserts that "It would be strange if a man with De Quincey's fondness for logic and analysis should have chosen his title as vaguely as his critics have understood it."[11] In a recent republication of the essay, the editor, Ulrich Weisstein criticizes De Quincey for seeing "fit to wreck the parallel by junctimizing formal (structural) features more or less indiscriminately with thematic ones."[12] Neither Brown nor Weisstein appears to know that De Quincey only titled the piece separately after a suggestion from his editor, John Blackwood. De Quincey

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[9] This sentence is part of the headnote that De Quincey added at the same time that he allowed Blackwood to separate *The Vision of Sudden Death* and *The Dream-Fugue* and adopt the titles. It is possible, therefore, that in this sentence he was trying to support his choice of the word "fugue" as he does with the other musical frames.

[10] Brown, "The Musical Structure of De Quincey's *Dream-Fugue* (1938)," 134-44.

[11] Brown, "The Musical Structure of De Quincey's *Dream-Fugue* (1938)," 134.

[12] Ulrich Weisstein, Introduction, "The Musical Structure of De Quincey's *Dream-Fugue* (1938)," by Calvin S. Brown, *Musico-Poetics in Perspective: Calvin S. Brown in Memoriam,* ed. Jean-Louis Cupers and Ulrich Weisstein, Word and Music Studies 2 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 137.

intended all to be titled "The English Mail-Coach,"[13] but when publishing the latter part in a subsequent issue, Blackwood "suggested giving the second instalment two separate titles: '1st the Vision of Sudden Death 2nd Dream Figures'" (16: 403), and it is only then, when De Quincey altered it slightly, that the piece came to be called a fugue.

This is not to say that De Quincey arbitrarily chose the words of the title. That it is a dream sequence is evident not only in its dream-like style, but also by the concluding line of "The Vision of Sudden Death": "[...] the turn of the road carried the scene out of my eyes in an instant, and swept it into my dreams for ever" (16: 442), and it is only fitting that Blackwood would suggest the word "Dream" for the title. But De Quincey chose the word "Fugue" himself and although as a title it was an after-thought, which implies that the form might not have been initially intended to strictly adhere to the musical structure as Brown suggests, it is an accurate and appropriate description of the piece. Like a fugue, De Quincey's "Dream-Fugue" has two voices, opposing point and counterpoint, that vie for the sympathy of the reader. On one hand a reader is accustomed to sympathize with the narrator of any story and is encouraged to respect this narrator's concern for the woman who is continually faced with sudden death. On the other hand, however, the narrator is often the cause of her peril and the reader cannot help but sympathize with her as well. Accustomed also to root for the underdog, it is nearly impossible to place all reader sympathy with the narrator's massive, overshadowing warship and his juggernaut triumphal car. Throughout "The Dream-Fugue" there is tension and conflict, extreme opposites – male and female, warship and fairy pinnace, reality and ideal, rational and irrational,

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[13] When De Quincey republished the work for *Selections Grave and Gay* he printed the entire piece with all its sections under one title: "The English Mail-Coach."

power and fragility – struggling with one another, pushing and pulling, and fleeing and pursuing.

It is certain that, despite the original lack of title and the fact that the structure does not exactly match the musical structure in the way that Brown and Weisstein would like, De Quincey did wish the piece to read like a piece of music might if that medium could be transformed into literature. The five variations are indeed very noisy and quite musical in their poetic prose. But De Quincey seems to have had it in mind when he began the entire work because at the beginning of "The English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of Motion," published before he had finished (or perhaps even started) writing "The Dream-Fugue," he drops hints such as calling the "Post-office service [...] some mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and so far in danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *baton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony" (16: 409); and when speaking about associations in his mind with Fanny of the Bath road, though suggesting, probably, the irrationality that accompanied those who dreamed of revolution, he says,

> The peculiarity consisted in the confluence of two different keys, though apparently repelling each other, into music and governing principles of the same dream; horror, such as possesses the maniac, and yet, by momentary transitions, grief, such as may be supposed to possess the dying mother when leaving her infant children to the mercies of the cruel (16: 421).

These thematic ideas are personified in the thematic form of "The Dream-Fugue" as they are in the conflicts, the use of opposites in language, the continual rise and fall of the pace, and in the struggle of reader sympathy. De Quincey also mentions the

musical form at the beginning and end of "The Dream-Fugue:" in the introduction he refers to the experience he relates as "Fragment of music" with "deep rolling chords" (16: 443); and in the final variation he says "then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue" (16: 448). De Quincey's prose piece is a poetic fugue and was thought of as such by him, though it was not primarily for the strict formal fugal structure that Brown and Weisstein were seeking. The music of this fugue is in the emotions that it evokes and in the tumult that its conflicting voices, sympathies and rhythms attempt to convey.

"The Dream-Fugue" does not have a traditional dream frame like each of the other works discussed in this thesis; only the title and the introduction initially announce its status as dream writing. Both of these paratexts combine the equal significance of dreams and music as interpretations and revisions of "The Vision of Sudden Death" and the passion of his experiences of thirty years before.[14] The dual form of dream and music reflects the theme, as it is outlined in the introduction:

> Epilepsy so brief of horror – wherefore is it that thou canst not die? Passing so suddenly into darkness, wherefore is it that still thou sheddest thy sad funeral blights upon the gorgeous mosaics of dreams? Fragment of music too stern, heard once and heard no more, what aileth thee that thy deep rolling chords come up at intervals through all the worlds of sleep, and after thirty years have lost no element of horror? (16: 443).

The "gorgeous mosaics of dreams," the beautiful ideals and aspirations still, after thirty years, are tainted by the shadows of the horrors that tainted them thirty years prior, and the "deep rolling chords," reverberations from a "Fragment of music too

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[14] In "The English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of Motion" he recalls the image of Fanny from thirty-five years ago. In 1849, when the piece was written, Waterloo was thirty-four years earlier.

stern" continues, in 1848 and 1849, the years of revolutions throughout Europe, to "come up at intervals" having "lost no element of horror" (16: 443). It is not only the form of dream and fugue that is introduced in these lines, not only a fragment of traumatic music that haunts dreams, but a deeper theme reflected in that form.

The first variation resembles *The Triumph of Life* in that what will be a dark and troubled piece of writing opens with joyous, summery imagery. The word "summer" is repeated three times in the opening to emphasize the significance of the setting: "Lo, it is summer, almighty summer! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown open wide" (16: 443). Yet in *The Confessions* De Quincey remarks on how he finds "the contemplation of death generally, [...] more affecting in summer" (2: 72) and there proceeds to tell another disturbing dream that begins on "a Sunday morning in May" (2: 72). He explains what he believes is the main reason why he links summer with death:

> [...] the exuberant and riotous prodigality of life naturally forces the mind more powerfully upon the antagonist thought of death, and the wintery sterility of the grave. For it may be observed, generally, that wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other. On these accounts it is that I find it impossible to banish the thought of death when I am walking alone in the endless days of summer [...] (2: 72).[15]

The irony, the drastic change from light and happiness to darkness and horror, is what makes the scene so effective. Since the first variation begins the dream prose piece as a whole, it is not surprising that De Quincey chooses to devote most of it to setting the

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[15] De Quincey explains his personal association of summer with death in *Suspiria de Profundis* when he tells of his sister's death in detail. See 15: 142-45.

light, summery, happy mood that will be in contrast to both the end of the first variation as well as to the remainder of the work as a whole.

The atmosphere is dreamy. It is both calm and festive though the two may generally seem almost juxtaposed. The narrator and the lady from "The Vision of Sudden Death" are both "floating," "slowly drifting" on the tranquil ocean (16: 443). Yet De Quincey compares the water to the "pathless chase" of a hunt and the deck of the "fairy pinnace" on which the woman floats is filled with "music," young men and women "dancing," caroling, and laughing (16: 443). The way in which De Quincey reconciles the two is what creates the dreamy atmosphere: the sound is muted through "echoes" (16: 443). Rather than seeming garish or noisy, the festive music only gives a joyful slant to the calm mood and together they create the surreal atmosphere of dream.

The cloud that suddenly descends on the joyful scene as the pinnace disappears and the music and laughter fall silent changes the mood from idyllic dream to nightmare. Had there been screams and a collision the scene would have seemed realistic; the mixture of mystery, anxiety, and unknowing results in the boding of nightmare, not the horror of reality. De Quincey emphasizes the confusion with questioning:

> What evil has smitten the pinnace, meeting or overtaking her? Did ruin to our friends couch within our own dreadful shadow? Was our shadow the shadow of death? I looked over the bow for an answer; and, behold! the pinnace was dismantled; the revel and the revellers were found no more; the glory of the vintage was dust; and the forest was left without a witness to its beauty upon the seas. 'But where,' and I turned to our own crew – 'where are the lovely women that

> danced beneath the awning of flowers and clustering corymbi? Whither have fled the noble young men that danced with *them*?' Answer there was none (16: 443-44).

The obscurity – the questioning and not understanding, and the feeling that one is caught in a drama he has no control over – is compounded by the apparent revelation, almost seemingly prophetic with its ominous biblical cadence: "the glory of the vintage was dust; and the forest was left without a witness to its beauty upon the seas" (16: 444). Amongst this passage of incomprehension there is also a pervading sense of knowing, a sense that he is asking the questions in vain for he knows "the glory of the vintage was dust" just as he knows "Answer there was none" (16: 444).

The revelation is a dream-like technique that allows De Quincey to present his most insightful and most charged comment while maintaining that his dreams are of some importance (implying that he has some innate genius for having had such revelations in his dreams), and while accurately emulating some dreams. The revelation – "the glory of the vintage was dust" (16: 444) – is both an insight that transcends time and any specific event since the glory of all history inevitably dies as it is gradually forgotten in favour of progress, and an insight that comments specifically on De Quincey's society as he saw it, for in 1849 after sixty years of political and social change, the glory of the monarchy and of the British Empire, the beauty of the unindustrialized landscape, and indeed the elegant grandeur of the mail-coach were fading into forgotten history. In "The English Mail-Coach" De Quincey says,

> when I look back upon those days, it seems to me that all things change or perish. Even thunder and lightning, it pains me to say, are not the thunder and lightning which I seem to remember about the time

> of Waterloo. Roses, I fear, are degenerating, and, without a Red revolution, must come to the dust. The Fannies of our island – though I say this with reluctance – are not improving; and the Bath road is notoriously superannuated (16: 420).

However the narrative of "The Dream-Fugue" does not overtly make these comments; rather, they are left to the vague and powerfully suggestive dream-language typified by such seeming-revelations.

It is an effective technique of dream writing that politics are subsumed by the text, that the narrative, in the first three variations, does not speak of it but is haunted by an impending need to be interpreted. The first indication that the dream sequence is in some way connected with the memory of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars is in the humorously jarring image of the second sentence: "the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating: she on a fairy pinnace, and I upon an English three-decker" (16: 443). The striking contrast is reminiscent of poetry satirical toward romantic hyperbole such as Marvell's "Thou by the Indian Ganges' side / Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide / Of Humber would complain."[16] V. A. De Luca goes as far as to say "The intrusion at this point of a real English three-decker with 'mighty bows' turns this idyllic scene into something grotesque, as harsh contemporaneity destroys the idealizing effect,"[17] or, I would add, reality destroys the dream.

It is not only the size and power of the battleship that charges the narrative with political suggestion, but also the insistence that it, like the mail-coach it represents, is specifically "English" (16: 443). As Frederick Burwick writes, "the semi-allegorical description of the mail-coach [is] as a mighty instrument of the state,

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[16] Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," *Andrew Marvell*, ed. Frank Kermode and Keith Walker, Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 5-7.
[17] V. A. De Luca, *Thomas De Quincey: The Prose of Vision* (Toronto: U of Toronto P: 1980) 108-9.

vehicle of national authority and power" and although De Quincey "seems to argue that the mail-coach was above the law and that anyone who dared challenge its authority was guilty of treason, the actual course of his narrative describes the horror that the unguided juggernaut has left in its wake."[18] In the same way the massive English three-decker is so powerful that once it is set in motion, it cannot easily be stopped. Like the coach, it "bears with it not only its own weight of power but the full weight of triumphant national destiny."[19]

That the massive ship over-shadows, over-powers and ultimately destroys the beautiful but fragile pinnace full of hedonistic revellers, "music and incense, amidst blossoms from the forest and gorgeous corymbi from vintages" (16: 443) clearly suggests the difficulty of having such power even with good intention. The dreamer is haunted by guilt and a knowledge that they were, however intentionally innocent, the cause of death and destruction: "Did ruin to our friends couch within our own dreadful shadow? Was our shadow the shadow of death? I looked over the bow for an answer; and, behold! the pinnace was dismantled" (16: 443). De Quincey does not write literally here about a collective guilt, but uses the form of dream prose to convey the tensions and difficulties, the inner conflicts, of collective anxieties.

At the end of the first variation there is a strong sense of boding, a darkening that will shade the remainder of "The Dream-Fugue." The disappearance and dismantling of the pinnace is marginalized and becomes only a foreshadow of what lies ahead:

> But suddenly the man at the masthead, whose countenance darkened with alarm, cried aloud – 'Sail on the weather-beam! Down she comes upon us; in seventy seconds she will founder!' (16: 444).

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[18] Frederick Burwick, *Thomas De Quincey: Knowledge and Power*, Romanticism in Perspective: Texts, Cultures, Histories (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001) 133-34.
[19] De Luca, *Thomas De Quincey: The Prose of Vision,* 112.

The alarm call in "The Vision of Sudden Death" comes back to haunt the dreamer in the form of a quasi-prophesy, as does the specific time of seventy seconds. The gig had only seventy seconds to avoid collision with the oncoming mail-coach; now with the pinnace it is repeated and the dreamer again finds himself helpless and with no control over the situation. It is with this dark boding, this foresight, anxiety, and reliving of the traumatic experience, that the first variation ends.

The relationship between "The Vision of Sudden Death" and "The Dream-Fugue" attempts to demonstrate the ability of dreams to deal with subconscious trauma. The role of each variation of the fugue is to descend by levels into the depths of the dreaming mind in pursuit of a resolution. De Quincey calls the sections of "The Dream-Fugue" "variations of the Dream" and "variation[s] of the Fugue" (16: 430) instead of "sections" in order to emphasize the connection, not separation, between them. The second variation hardly seems to be a different dream. It continues from the end of the first variation with the same setting except that the scenery alters: "I looked to the weather-side, and the summer had departed. The sea was rocking, and shaken with gathering wrath" (16: 444). The transformation is very effectively modelled on dreams, giving the impression that one dream sequence leads directly into the next but is yet new and somewhat independent. In this variation the troubled ending of the first continues to gather force, the surface of the traumatic dreaming mind that the poem depicts reflecting the sea that is "gathering wrath" (16: 444), and anxiety begins to build. While the terror in the first sentence is a continuation, the second sentence foretells of the fourth variation. The "arches and long cathedral aisles" (16: 444) are at present only "mists" (16: 444), only a suggestion of what will later be exposed in stone as the dream sequence moves deeper into the dreaming mind of the narrator. Both recall the scene of the accident in "The

Vision of Sudden Death" – "Before us lay an avenue, straight as an arrow, six hundred yards, perhaps, in length; and the umbrageous trees, which rose in a regular line from either side, meeting high overhead, gave to it the character of a cathedral aisle" (16: 439) – as they replay in altered form the traumatic moment. Where the anxiety of the first variation is troubled but still elusive, that of the second is much more forceful, and more disturbed.

The pace of the second variation is considerably faster than the first, conveying a sense of urgency and desperation to avoid danger and disaster, and reflecting the growing sense of anxiety. The accident of the English three-decker with the fairy pinnace is repeated but this time it is with a frigate that is running "with the fiery pace of a quarrel from a cross-bow" (16: 444). This time the collision is narrowly avoided, but still the lady from the fairy pinnace, appearing like a ghost, "high aloft amongst the shrouds" (16: 444) is in danger as the "deeps opened ahead in malice to receive her, towering surges of foam ran after her, the billows were fierce to catch her" (16: 444), and even still she narrowly escapes and continues to narrowly escape.

The scene of the tragedy is haunted by the hysterical woman of "The Vision of Sudden Death," as was foretold by the narrator who wondered "will that spectacle ever depart from my dreams, as she rose and sank on her seat, sank and rose, threw her arms wildly to heaven, clutched at some visionary object in the air, fainting, praying, raving, despairing" (16: 442). As she is pursued by threats of sudden death in the second variation, her image becomes sublime, as does the whole variation. The ghost-like figure becomes a raving madwoman:

> [...] still by sight I followed her, as she ran before the howling gale, chased by angry sea-birds and by maddening billows; still I saw her, as

at the moment when she ran past us, amongst the shrouds, with her white draperies streaming before the wind. There she stood with hair dishevelled, one hand clutched amongst the tackling – rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying – there for leagues I saw her as she stood, raising at intervals one hand to heaven, amidst the fiery crests of the pursuing waves and the raving of the storm (16: 444).

No longer the epitome of the beautiful and the ideal, the woman resembles the symbol of liberty with her one hand raised to heaven, but she is shattered and torn, and "chased by angry sea-birds," waves and storms (16: 444). She is also reminiscent of the figure of Britannia, though significantly she has no shield, as well as a symbol of ravished and half-destroyed ideals. This descent from the beautiful to the sublime continues throughout "The Dream-Fugue" as the imagery and the passions involved become more and more sublime; the beautiful is left behind as the narrative descends into the depths of the dreaming mind.

Along with the language of the sublime, the second variation has language that helps create a dream-like effect. The quickening pace of the first half of the second variation, created with phrases such as "gathering wrath," "mighty mists," "fiery pace of a quarrel from a cross-bow," "ran a frigate," "exclaimed," "close upon us," "impulse of a heady current," "sudden vortex," "wheeling," "forged," "ran past us," "deeps opened ahead in malice," "towering surges," "ran after her," and "fierce to catch her," is suddenly suspended with the light, airy and slow middle line, "But far away she was borne into desert spaces of the sea" (16: 444). The "a," "o," and "s" sounds draw out the line and the language of "far away," "borne," and "desert spaces" evokes the dreamy atmosphere of romance, even if the word "desert" taints it with an emptiness and an isolation, and "borne" suggests it is not by her own free will. The

sentence injects into the very middle of the variation a hush and a faraway-ness that replaces any of the dreamy quality of the first variation that may have been lost in the build-up of anxiety.

The pace picks up again immediately after the suspension of the middle line, but the effect of the dream-like language lingers and continues to resonate as the sublime image of the hysterical woman recedes into the distance and is lost. After the rapid pace of "ran before the howling gale," "chased by angry sea-birds and by maddening billows," "ran past us," "streaming before the wind," "dishevelled," "clutched," "tackling," "rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying," "fiery crests," "pursuing waves" and "raving of the storm," the ending slows the pace and dispels the sounds to echoes: "until at last, upon a sound from afar of malicious laughter and mockery, all was hidden for ever in driving showers" (16: 444). In the same way that the festive laughter of the first variation echoes in the distance and refuses to clash with the peaceful moment, so here does the malicious laughter "sound from afar" (16: 444) and is drowned out by the sound of rain. These muted and distant sounds create an effect similar to the cinematic technique of giving dream scenes a faraway quality, and ensure that the narrative remains in a dream-like form.

The very end of the second variation impresses again the dream-like form of the "The Dream-Fugue" with its insistence on obscurity and the narrator's lack of knowledge or control: "and afterwards, but when I know not, and how I know not," (16: 444). It also functions as a connection between the second and third variations by insisting on the narrator as one continuous self. After the action of the second variation, he indicates, the action of the third occurred, though he cannot explain when or how. The comma at the end of the second variation is essential to understanding that it is the action of the third variation to which he is referring as

"afterwards" (16: 444). One "Dream-Fugue" variation leads into the next in the same way that dreams lead, one after another, into subsequent dreams.

The third variation is self-contained and could easily stand on its own as no sentence refers back to the previous variation or forward to the next. It would be possible to take it out of its context and still have a piece of coherent dream prose. It is quite different from the first two variations, which are similar, and from the last two, which are also similar to one another. Nevertheless, it is haunted by "The Vision of Sudden Death" and replays the collision again in its own way, transforming many of the same images as in the other variations. The scenery of the third variation connects to the first two in that the narrator is still on a boat at the beginning, but it is "moored to some familiar shore" (16: 444) and from there the action moves inland. The woman from the collision is transformed into a young girl and instead of being on a festive, flower-decorated fairy pinnace as in the first variation or clothed in white draperies as in the second, here she is "adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival" (16: 444). Again the text is filled with anxiety and haste, and the girl is faced with sudden death. However, the third variation has a mediating role in the five variations to detach the reader from the narrative of the first two and distance him enough that he is prepared for the last two. In this role it sits at the centre of the fugue as a coherent, self-contained whole.

The muted, echoed, distant "laughter and mockery" (16: 444) of the second variation alters into an equally muted toll of "Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance" (16: 444). Yet while the bells are sweet and distant, they are nevertheless "wailing" (16: 444) and are loud enough to awaken the sleeping narrator. De Quincey begins with the word "Sweet" (16: 444) and gradually suggests that the sound is not unnoticeable in order to emulate dreams and the gradual build-up to

recognition and understanding, as well as waking where the sounds of the environment may meld into the dream and seem soothing, though as the dreamer awakes he gradually begins to realize something of the noise.[20]

As the sounds progressively become more conscious, so does the action of the variation. Unlike the second variation, which began *in medias res*, the third reflects the waking recognition (be it rather waking into another dream) of the narrator and opens gradually:

> The morning twilight even then was breaking; and, by the dusky revelations which it spread, I saw a girl adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival, running along the solitary strand with extremity of haste (16: 444).

The sentence is slow to pick up pace, begins with images of dawn breaking and goes into detail and description before eventually building up with the words "great" and "running" to the final climax of the crescendo, "with extremity of haste" (16: 444).

With the narrative now fully awakened, anxiety is in full swing, as is the pace, which continues to mount as do the number of perils that threaten the girl:

> Her running was the running of panic; and often she looked back as to some dreadful enemy in the rear. But when I leaped ashore, and followed on her steps to warn her of a peril in front, alas! from me she fled as from another peril; and vainly I shouted to her of quicksands that lay ahead. Faster and faster she ran; round a promontory of rock she wheeled out of sight (16: 444-45).

The anxiety of the other dream variations is repeated and this is again a narrative that replays, in an attempt to come to terms with, the trauma of "The Vision of Sudden

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[20] See *CNB* 1: 1620 for an example of this phenomenon.

Death." There are several techniques employed here to create the effect of dream writing. It is unclear to the reader what the girl is running from, what she is doing there, why she is in trouble, and it is also unclear how the freshly awakened narrator in a boat knows what lies ahead of the girl or why she is afraid of him. Again it is the obscurity and unknowing of dreams that De Quincey is emulating. The overwhelming and inexplicable fear also follows the feeling of a dreamer in the midst of an anxiety dream. The hysterics of the woman in "The Vision of Sudden Death" and the second variation are transformed into the panic of the girl, which here emulate the panic sometimes experienced in dreams.

The action as well as the language recalls the first and second variations. The near-collision of the boats is replaced with a human chase and tragedy involving nature, however the repetition of vocabulary such as "wheeled" (16: 445) attempts to link them. In the second variation as the frigate is about to collide with the ship, "some impulse of a heady current or sudden vortex gave a wheeling bias to her course" (16: 444) and in the third both the girl and the narrator "wheeled" round a promontory (16: 445). The description is strange when referring to someone running and does immediately suggest a maritime image. The quicksand, too, is very much like the ocean in the first two variations, "treacherous" (16: 445) as it swallows her up recalling "The deeps [that] opened ahead in malice to receive" the woman of the second variation (16: 444).

As the girl sinks into the quicksand, again the motions of the hysterical woman in "The Vision of Sudden Death" are repeated:

> I saw by the early twilight this fair young head, as it was sinking down to darkness – saw this marble arm, as it rose above her head and her treacherous grave, tossing, faultering, rising, clutching as at some false

> deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds – saw this marble arm uttering her dying hope, and then her dying despair (16: 445).

For the first time, however, the actions do not seem like a maniacal overreaction, because for the first time the vision of sudden death is realized. The image recalls a vision of an armorial shield earlier in "The English Mail-Coach" described as,

> a vast emblazonry of human charities and human lovliness that have perished, but quartered heraldically with unutterable horrors of monstrous and demonic natures; whilst over all rises, as a surmounting crest, one fair female hand, with the fore-finger pointing, in sweet, sorrowful admonition, upwards to heaven, and having power (which, without experience, I never could have believed) to awaken the pathos that kills in the very bosom of the horrors that madden the grief that gnaws at the heart, together with the monstrous creations of darkness that shock the belief, and make dizzy the reason of man (16: 421).

In both of the passages the girl, the very emblem of liberty with her "marble arm" (16: 445) raised in the air, is disappointed by God, either blaming Him for the horrors of the earth or believing that it is He who should have but has not saved her. In this middle of the five variations, she (and notably not the narrator) questions the role of God in the horror of sudden death, and by symbolic extension, in war, terror and strife.

It is "the treachery of earth, our mother" (16: 445), not God, that is the cause of the girl's death, though it appears that the narrator has played no small role as accomplice. The girl is doomed from the beginning, running in panic as if from "some dreadful enemy in the rear" (16: 445), and "with garlands drest" (Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" 34) as for some sacrifice. Yet it is the narrator who appears to

chase her into the quicksands, despite his intentions. There is a hint of guilt at the apparent causality extended from his paralysis in "The Vision of Sudden Death" and his role in the collision. His role has altered, but it has the same anxiety, the same mix of good intention and guilt for not having done enough to prevent the accident.

"The Dream-Fugue" is often troubled by the loss of memory. In the first variation when the fairy pinnace is dismantled the narrator laments that "the forest was left without a witness to its beauty upon the seas" (16: 444). The line is particularly strange since the narrator and the others on his ship *are* witnesses that are left and the narrator does remember and pass on the story to the reader. In the same way memory is an intense concern of the narrator's when the girl is buried in the quicksand in the third variation:

> The head, the diadem, the arm, – these all had sunk; at last over these also the cruel quicksand had closed; and no memorial of the fair young girl remained on earth, except my own solitary tears, and the funeral bells from the desert seas, that, rising again more softly, sang a requiem over the grave of the buried child, and over her blighted dawn.
>
> I sate, and wept in secret the tears that men have ever given to the memory of those that died before the dawn, and by the treachery of earth, our mother (16: 445).

The narrator laments the loss of the girl's life and the fact that she died before the dawn, but his grief is also highly concerned with memory. His tears are "given to the memory" (16: 445) rather than to the girl herself, and are the girl's only memorial aside from the sweet funeral bells that were tolling while she was yet alive and are not solely for her. More than thirty years after Waterloo the text is haunted by the memory of what De Quincey saw as the fateful, though unnaturally quick rise of

liberty and her inevitable death before the dawn.[21] Memory is what connects the dream variations because it is the one stable force in the dreamer's mind that controls the images of the dreams, and memory is what causes the dreams to occur thirty years later. It is all that is left of that turbulent, exciting, yet troubling time in history, and even memory can be lost in time.

The funeral bells toll for those who, like the girl, "die before the dawn" (16: 444). Throughout the third variation De Quincey plays with definitions of dawn leading to several suggestions. Literally the girl has died before sunrise, but De Quincey calls it "The morning twilight" (16: 444), a phrase that recalls the end of one day as it suggests the morning of the next. Metaphorically the girl, not yet a woman, has died before her dawn, as the funeral bells that sing "over her blighted dawn" (16: 445) testify. However, the politicized ending of the variation also suggests that she, and many others, have died before the dawn of a new world, a new era, for as she dies, just when the "morning twilight even then was breaking" and spreading "dusky revelations" (16: 444),

> the tears and funeral bells were hushed suddenly by a shout as of many nations, and by a roar as from some great king's artillery advancing rapidly along the valleys, and heard afar by its echoes among the mountains (16: 445).

The end of one era has come, as has the dawn of another. This dawn, however, is not without its victims.

De Quincey again emulates dreams with his elusive, uncertain language and with his dream-like revelations. It is never entirely certain that an army is approaching. When the running girl looks back it is only "*as* to some dreadful

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[21] For an interesting insight into De Quincey's views on the French Revolution and on England's reaction, see his essay "A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism and Radicalism?" (9: 380-414).

enemy" (16: 445). Likewise when the narrator hears a shout and a roar they are "*as* of many nations" and "*as* from *some* great king's artillery" (16: 445). She may perceive them, as well as the narrator, to be her enemies, but it is not certain that they are. When the action is repeated in the fifth variation there is a similar uncertainty, followed by a recognition that it is "the triumphs of the earth [that] were advancing" (16: 448). Here a similar revelation follows:

> as I bent my ear earthwards to listen – "hush! – this either is the very anarchy of strife, or else" – and then I listened more profoundly, and said as I raised my head – "or else, oh heavens! it is *victory* that swallows up all strife" (16: 445).

The two statements question the nature of the perceived "enemy in the rear" (16: 445), and whether they are the cause or the end of strife. As the narrator listens to the earth, to nature, it is the more profound revelation, one that echoes St. Paul,[22] that confirms the perceived enemy as the true hero. It is not war that is the anarchy of strife, but rather, as De Quincey argued in 1848 in his essay against the abolition of war, "it is *victory* that swallows up all strife" (16: 445).[23]

In the fourth variation the tensions being played out more elusively in the first three variations come to the fore as the politics that earlier was subsumed by the text transcends its symbols into the literal text. It is here that the threads running throughout "The English Mail-Coach" begin to weave together into a coherent set of

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[22] The revelation echoes 1 Corinthians 15: 54 on the resurrection: "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" *The Bible: Authorized King James Version.*

[23] In his article "War," published just a year before "The English Mail-Coach" and, as Robert Hopkins points out, published preceeding "The English Mail-Coach" in *Selections Grave and Gay*, De Quincey argues that war "*cannot*" and "*ought* not to be abolished" (16: 273). He believed that war cannot be abolished because the causes of war will always exist, and that it ought not to be abolished because disputes with irrational parties must be resolved and so much better for a trained, honourable army to do it than underground guerrillas with no laws to govern their actions. War, he believed, could fight injustice and its victory could swallow up all strife. See 16: 267-288. See also Hopkins, "De Quincey on War," 129-51.

themes. The dream has moved into a deeper level of the dreaming mind to reveal the heart of what troubles the entirety of "The English Mail-Coach."

Though the narrator was the inadvertent murderer of the young girl in the third variation, he is immediately "carried over land and sea to some distant *kingdom*, and placed upon a triumphal car, amongst companions crowned with laurel" (16: 445; my emphasis). He has mourned the death of the girl and also recognized that it is "*victory* that swallows up all strife," so may rejoice with those who bring news of the great triumph away from any republic to "the kingdom" (16: 445).

The fourth variation, like the third, again takes place at night, though where it was nearly dawn before it is now before midnight. The mighty crowds and those on the triumphal car at the centre of them are gathered in the darkness waiting, until finally tidings arrived "of a grandeur that measured itself against the centuries" (16: 445) and all break out in tears and song: "too full of pathos they were, too full of joy that acknowledged no fountain but God, to utter themselves by other language than by tears, by restless anthems, by reverberations rising from every choir, of the *Gloria in excelsis*." (16: 445). Those on the "laurelled car," the transformation of the mail-coach, are the privileged who will take the secret word of "Waterloo and Recovered Christendom!" (16: 446) to all the nations as they had taken it to the provinces in "Going Down With Victory."

The news they bring is sublime and comes in a vision of the apocalypse. The "word" (16: 446) resembles the Word of God as it is depicted in terms that insist it is divine, instilling the fear of God and placing emphasis on His almighty power. As the "dreadful word," shining high above, lights the way as it goes before them, it recalls the star of Bethlehem that led the wise men to the newborn Christ. Yet at the same time it is not a beautiful guiding star, but an awe-ful "word" that leads the triumphal

car "at a flying gallop" (16: 446) through the land and that by the power of its mere "presence" causes city gates to be opened to receive them, causes the rivers to fall silent, the "infinite forests" to shiver "in homage," and the gates of the "mighty minster," "which rose to the clouds," to "silently [move] back upon their hinges" (16: 446). So mighty is it that, unlike the light in John 1: 5, even "the darkness comprehended it" (16: 446). It has a supernatural power that evokes as much sublime awe as it does excitement and trust in its goodness.

The "mighty minster," in which the majority of the variation takes place is quintessential De Quinceyan sublime dream architecture. It recalls the immensity of Piranesi's architecture that De Quincey had discussed in *The Confessions* as having "the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction [as the] architecture [in his] dreams" where he says he "beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as was never yet beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds" (2: 68-69). De Quincey explains in *The Confessions* that in his dreams often,

> The sense of space, and in the end, the sense of time, were both powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, &c. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity. This, however, did not disturb me so much as the vast expansion of time; I sometimes seemed to have lived for 70 or 100 years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a millennium passed in that time, or, however, of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience (2: 66-67).[24]

[24] Other examples appear throughout "The English Mail-Coach," such as his dreams of "a mighty dial, sculptured with the hours, and with the dreadful legend of TOO LATE" (16: 421), as well as in "The Vision of Sudden Death" when the space of a minute and a half, then 70 seconds widens into several pages of prose (16: 440-42). This latter is not a dream, but is still a "Vision."

The "mighty minster" (16: 446) is perhaps De Quincey's most poignant description of what he was referring to in *The Confessions*. The minster is so vast that the triumphal car gallops through it with no end in sight – "Forty leagues we might have run in the cathedral, and as yet no strength of morning light had reached us" (16: 446) - and far off upon the horizon, but still within the great minster, there is "a city of sepulchres" (16: 446) of purple granite that "lay like a stain upon the horizon – so mighty was the distance" (16: 446). The cathedral is utterly sublime with its dark, gothic grandeur and its necropolis offset by the "white-robed choristers" that line "the aërial galleries" singing "deliverance" (16: 446), and its mighty, infinite proportions, perhaps even greater than those of Keats's temple of Saturn, are the very essence of De Quinceyan dream prose.

De Quincey, using his maxim "the Dream is a law to itself" (20: 35), manipulates both time and space to create the atmosphere of a dream. As the car charges through the "city of sepulchres" in the seemingly infinite cathedral, the narrative moves back and forth between the two abstract concepts, relating time to space with a precision in time that counters the impossibility of precision in space:

> Of purple granite was the necropolis; yet, in the first minute, it lay like a purple stain upon the horizon – so mighty was the distance. In the second minute it trembled through many changes, growing into terraces and towers of wondrous altitude, so mighty was the pace. In the third minute already, with our dreadful gallop, we were entering its suburbs. Vast sarcophagi rose on every side, having towers and turrets that, upon the limits of the central aisle, strode forward with haughty intrusion, that ran back with mighty shadows into answering recesses (16: 446-47).

The short, precise measurements of time and the "mighty [...] distance" (16: 446) demonstrated by the quickly changing scenery, accentuate the "mighty [...] pace" (16: 446) of their "dreadful gallop" (16: 447). The horizon that too quickly becomes suburbs allows the narrator to see the scenery grow and change, but with a supernatural speed that seems dream-like. Perhaps more effective is the shifting of both sentence and scenery as the "sarcophagi rose," and its "towers and turrets" "strode forward," on "the limits of the central aisle," which "ran back with mighty shadows into answering recesses" (16: 447). The shadows increase the immense size of the sarcophagi and the immense distance of the aisle, while also distorting the perspective of its limits and where one is thought to end and the other begin. By manipulating time and space in this way, De Quincey is able to achieve a highly imaginative dream-like scenery.

While the pace of the first variation is slow and calm, the pace of the second and third mount, leading up to the climax in this fourth variation. After the initial delay, "upbraided" by the "snortings and tramplings [of their] horses" (16: 445), the triumphal car sets off "at a flying gallop;" "Headlong was [their] pace" (16: 445-46) as they ran through the infinite Cathedral with "the secret word that was flying past" (16: 446). As they gallop down the central aisle, "of [their] headlong pace was neither pause nor remission" (16: 446). The pace is fast throughout this section of the variation, and the text gradually moves in to focus on that speed and motion:

> Where the terraces ran, there did *we* run; where the towers curved, there did *we* curve. With the flight of swallows our horses swept round every angle. Like rivers in flood, wheeling round headlands; like hurricanes that ride into the secrets of forests; faster than ever light unwove the mazes of darkness, our flying equipage carried earthly

> passions – kindled warrior instincts – amongst the dust that lay around us; dust oftentimes of our noble fathers that had slept in God from Créci to Trafalgar (16: 447).

The pace of the text mirrors the pace of the car, one spreading excitement and jubilation, the other attempting to involve the reader in like emotions, for De Quincey felt in 1849 that "Nile nor Trafalgar has power any more to raise an extra bubble in a steam-kettle" (16: 417). Here even the dust of the dead awakened with the passion of Waterloo, and it seemed that all were ablaze with the news, the car running at a mighty pace with the excitement, when suddenly the pace hits its climax, not only of the variation, but of the entire "Dream-Fugue." Not all were caught up in the excitement and pace, for a baby in its carriage, a version of the gig in "The Vision of Sudden Death" and of the slow, calm, yet festive pinnace and revellers of the first variation, is slowly and obliviously moving down the aisle toward the oncoming triumphal car. The pace is suddenly suspended at this climax as the car and carriage are about to collide, the Dying Trumpeter on a bas-relief comes to life and blows his trumpet, the car with its horses' hoofs raised in mid-halt are frozen into a bas-relief, the choir ceases to sing, and the baby disappears. The prolonged speed of the car and its sudden suspension from movement make this a powerful, effective and highly dramatic climax to "The Dream-Fugue."

There is no specific allegory that holds all the way through the prose poem, but the images often impress a need to be symbolically interpreted. The bas-reliefs on the sarcophagi are not only images of death, they also serve to remind the reader of war in general and the Napoleonic Wars in particular when they are described as,

> bas-reliefs of battles – bas-reliefs of battlefields; of battles from forgotten ages – of battles from yesterday – of battle-fields that, long

> since, nature had healed and reconciled to herself with the sweet oblivion of flowers – of battle-fields that were yet angry and crimson with carnage (16: 447).

The vast necropolis that had from a distance looked "like a purple stain upon the horizon" (16: 446) and the "city of sepulchres, built with the saintly cathedral for the warrior dead that rested from their feuds on earth" (16: 446) together with the bas-reliefs remind the reader of how much war and the justification of war, sin and death in God's world are at the heart of "The Dream-Fugue." War has always existed on earth in some form, De Quincey would argue, history is littered with wars, and it exists for a reason: because "*victory* [...] swallows up all strife" (16: 445).

The images of war serve to remind the reader of the politics that had earlier been subsumed by the text but are now at the surface so that when the narrator asks "Oh baby! [...] shalt thou be the ransom for Waterloo?" (16: 447), the reader is fully alert to the symbolic reading. The female infant is the very image of innocent ideals, lovely and pure, oblivious to the realities of the world as she rides along, playing, in her own strange version of the apocalyptic chariot:

> [...] we beheld a female infant that rode in a carriage as frail as flowers. The mists, which went before her, hid the fawns that drew her, but could not hide the shells and tropic flowers with which she played – but could not hide the lovely smiles by which she uttered her trust in the mighty cathedral (16: 447).

The fawns hidden in the mists perversely resemble the "wonder-wingèd team" (95) of Shelley's apocalyptic triumphal car in *The Triumph of Life*, for "The Shapes which drew it in thick lightnings / Were lost" (96-97). Yet the similarities end there, for this is an innocent, hedonistic, idealistic copy. "The Dream-Fugue's" triumphal car with

its horses, bringing the Word of God and triumphant news to "every people" (16: 447), is the true apocalyptic chariot as the fate of the infant testifies. The infant's carriage would bring about its own ruin by the course that it pursues, oblivious to what is going on around it. The triumphal car is too mighty to come to complete ruin itself, but would bring about the ruin of the carriage and all it represents, by its sheer force, speed and power. Yet while death may have been the result, just as at the apocalypse, it is for a greater good and to fulfill God's gracious will that it would happen. Through the action De Quincey insists that though one may not understand war, sin and death, ultimately one must believe, as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15, which De Quincey echoes, that God has a purpose and that his love and mercy will prevail.

As the carriage and triumphal car are about to collide, the narrator rose in horror, but did not act to prevent the collision. In "The Vision of Sudden Death" he had also been nearly powerless to prevent a collision. There he shouted and thereby effectively warned the gig. However, it was not his action alone that saved it from total destruction: "Mine had been the first step: the second was for the young man: the third was for God" (16: 440). Here the narrator has sympathy and perhaps good intentions, but it is the Dying Trumpeter who intervenes to save the carriage. The political semi-allegory transforms into a full apocalyptic vision as life ceases in the narrator and his crew when the trumpet is sounded twice, then begins again anew when sounded a third time, carrying "temptation into the graves" (16: 447). The infant, now a woman, has reached her judgement day and amidst a crimson radiance, perhaps of the dawn before which her former emanation in the third variation had died, and certainly a symbol of the bloody fields of terror and war, her fate is torn between death and new life. As she clings "to the horns of the altar" (16: 448), she is

both sacrificial victim and one pleading (or being pleaded for by "her better angel" (16: 448)) for sanctuary,[25] "sinking, rising, trembling, fainting – raving, despairing" (16: 448) when faced with death. However, De Quincey insists on God's mercy and forgiveness, and in the end the woman is granted deliverance and God's glory reigns. After four variations of tumult, horror and the threat of sudden death, "The Dream-Fugue" begins to find resolution.

After the climax, pause and resumption of the fourth variation, the fifth variation acts as the grand finale:

> Then rose the agitation, spreading through the infinite cathedral, to its agony; then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue. The golden tubes of the organ, which as yet had but sobbed and muttered at intervals – gleaming amongst clouds and surges of incense – threw up, as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music. Choir and anti-choir were filling fast with unknown voices. Thou also, Dying Trumpeter! – with thy love that was victorious, and thy anguish that was finishing, didst enter the tumult: trumpet and echo – farewell love, and farewell anguish – rang through the dreadful *sanctus* (16: 448).

This strong emphasis on music builds on the choirs singing *Gloria in excelsis* throughout the fourth variation, and is also an extension of the music on the pinnace and the funeral bells of earlier variations. Here it reaches its full potential, its full volume, and is the ultimate musical praise and jubilation of God. Even in this praise, De Quincey does not forget the balance in life that he is trying to convey; even in the ultimate glory to God, he includes "agitation" and "agony," "farewell love" as well as

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[25] See 16: 624 n81: "In the Old Testament, sacrifices were placed upon the horns of the altar (for example, Exodus 29: 12); they were also clasped by those seeking sanctuary (for example, 1 Kings 1: 50)."

"farewell anguish," and there still exists both point and counterpoint – "Choir and anti-choir" (16: 448). Even in this, the beginning of resolution, war, sin and death still exist, but only to be overcome by God's love in the end.

Although the carriage of the fourth variation is gone, there are still, as in all of the variations, two parties – also point and counterpoint. As in the third variation the parties are one behind the other, not coming towards each other. Again it is uncertain whether the other party is in flight or pursuit. The narrator, who never questioned the triumph or good news his car brought in the fourth variation, now falters; but God's love is the resolution, for it is no fearful enemy, but "the triumphs of earth [that] were advancing" (16: 448). He excuses his faltering, blaming his acute knowledge of the existence of opposites in the world; it is difficult for one who knows that anguish often accompanies joy to remember that God's great goodness does prevail, he argues.[26] However, he quickly realizes his mistake, and that God's love prevails.

As the fifth variation reaches its centre, the move towards resolution gathers pace and is finally achieved. A voice from Heaven proclaims the end of panic, fear and sudden death, and point and counterpoint move together, one engulfing the other, and find resolution in one harmonious whole. The deaths of the Napoleonic Wars find victory in the peace of Waterloo. The young girl of "The Dream-Fugue" along with all she represents – the woman of "The Vision of Sudden Death," liberty, a vulnerable Britannia, the revellers of the French Revolution, innocence – has peered

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[26] The reference to De Quincey's sister Elizabeth, who died when he was six years of age – "that, from six years old, [my heart] didst never hear the promise of perfect love" (16: 448)" – has probably been part of the reason why many critics feel justified in seeing the woman as an emanation of her. In some respects she is, but she is much more than that, as I hope I have shown, and this line refers to more than just her. It refers to the first time De Quincey (or rather the narrator of *Suspiria de Profundis*, who tells the story of Elizabeth's death) knew of the anguish of the world, the first time he recognized that with joy comes treachery (16: 448), and it is this life of balancing opposites to which he is referring, more than to Elizabeth herself.

over the edge of life at death, yet has been saved by God, as "an occasion to glorify his goodness" (16: 449).

The conclusion of the fifth variation and of the piece as a whole brings together the semi-allegories that underlie "The Dream-Fugue" and reflects on the nature of war, sin and death in God's world in general. A thousand times has he seen the world about to reach true goodness, following the Word of God, but faltering – "sinking, rising, fluttering, fainting" yet "then suddenly reconciled, adoring" (16. 449), all with the purpose, he insists, of glorifying the goodness of God: "only that at the last, with one motion of his victorious arm, he might record and emblazon the endless resurrections of his love!" (16: 449). In the end De Quincey has, to his mind, justified the existence of war, and the ways of God to men.

In "The Dream-Fugue" De Quincey emulates dreams to explore the tensions between the horrors and triumphs of war that lay in the depths of the private and public subconscious of a generation that was forgetting Waterloo. He charges the dream sequence with a significance that echoes the seeming profundity of dreams, and uses symbolism to suggest layers of meaning that haunt the surface of the text. De Quincey uses the lawlessness of the dream form, mingled with music and sound, with biblical cadence and with surreal visual imagery, to take "The Dream-Fugue" to the heights of prophetic and visionary impassioned prose.

Conclusion

Dream in Romantic poetry is integrally bound with creativity and the Romantic imagination. Sleeping dreams were often seen as the imagination's own dramas, unrestricted by waking reason, which led to theories that poetry should emulate a dream in its creativity and its inducement of a willing suspension of disbelief. Because of this relationship, dream came to signify the idea or ideal for which poetry is the written representation. When the Romantic poets took up the form of dream poetry, it was very often to explore the relationship between dreams and poetry. Romantic poets found in dream poetry a highly imaginative literary space in which they could both reveal and represent the processes of the imagination in creativity.

In recent years critical works such as those by Jennifer Ford and Alan Richardson have persuaded many to see dream in the Romantic era as deeply physiological and materialist.[1] Through their emphasis on medical theory they have been instrumental in moving criticism against the view that the Romantic poets were more interested in the creative, aesthetic, poetic potential of the imagination. In *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* Ford argues that Coleridge's "insistence on the corporeal, medical character of dreams challenges the notion of a purely aesthetic, idealist Romantic imagination, entirely separated from material or bodily concerns."[2] Coleridge was indeed interested in the nature of dreams and believed in a strong relationship between the body and the mind. He did not believe in a "purely aesthetic, idealist" imagination, but neither are his material concerns more important to his poetry. As Wordsworth says of Coleridge,

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[1] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 1-25.
[2] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming,* 203.

to thee

Science appears but what in truth she is,

Not as our glory and our absolute boast,

But as a succedaneum, and a prop

To our infirmity. Thou art no slave

Of that false secondary power by which

In weakness we create distinctions, then

Deem that our puny boundaries are things

Which we perceive, and not which we have made.

To thee, unblinded by these outward shows,

The unity of all has been revealed (*Prelude* 2: 216-26).

For Coleridge, the physiological is part of the unity, certainly, but it is only a small part, not "our glory" (2: 218). Coleridge did notice that bodily sensations could trigger dreams, but his theories of dream and the imagination go far beyond this causal interest. Dream meant more to Coleridge than the narrow definition of sleeping dreams. The fact that he recognized a connection between physical sensation and sleeping dreams does not detract from his interest in dream – what is imagined – as the poetic ideal and its complex relation to creativity and the processes of the imagination. These aesthetic interests are what provide the foundations for his theories on literature and insight into some of his best poetry. By largely dismissing Romantic aesthetics, such critics present an unbalanced perspective on Romantic poetry.

Ford and Richardson are not alone and criticism that turns away from creativity and poetic imagination in Romantic poetry is by no means limited to Coleridge or to the study of dreams. These two critics are symptomatic of a wider

move in literary criticism against the traditional view of the Romantic imagination. Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* and Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* have been instrumental in leading criticism to reject the key issues that interested Romantic poets in favour of political and historical issues that modern readers may find subsumed by the poetry.[3] One effect of this widespread change is that it has led to criticism focusing on issues that are marginal to the poetry and downplaying Romantic interest in the poetic ideal.

By re-examining dream in its various emanations in Romantic poetry, I have sought to remind readers of the *romantic* nature of the Romantic imagination and to re-emphasize what the most significant aspects of the dreaming mind were for Romantic poetry. This thesis challenges the wave of recent materialist criticism through a rediscovery of Romantic aesthetics. Critics following McGann have neglected to listen to what the Romantics thought about creativity, and have largely misunderstood the issues at the heart of many poems. This thesis reasserts the profound significance of creativity, dreams and the Romantic imagination in Romantic poetry.

In an age when the role of the poet was being sidelined by the emphasis of theorists on reason and the rational mind (an emphasis that ironically rings true in the criticism of Ford and Richardson), Romantic poets were using dream to assert the value of art and creativity. This was an age in which Wordsworth called "Philosophy" an "ape" (*Prelude* 5: 549-50) for its dismissal of imaginative literature, in which Shelley felt the need to defend poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (*Defence* 701) and Keats fought against the implication that a poet is a

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[3] Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830*, Opus (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981); McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*.

mere dreamer. In dream, Romantic poets discovered a creative space that demonstrated the power of the imagination. Dream is a central issue in Romantic poetry because it helped to define the role of the poet in a time when the creative imagination was subordinated to reason and largely marginalized. Far from being a primarily medical interest, dream to the Romantic poets is deeply involved with the processes of the imagination in creativity.

Much of the interest in dreams for Romantic poets springs from the relationship between dreams and poetry. Coleridge, Wordsworth and De Quincey in particular saw dreams as nature's dramas, the imagination's own poetry. In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey describes dreams as the theatre of the mind: "a corresponding change took place in my dreams; a theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour" (*DQ* 2: 66). De Quincey and Coleridge both wrote about their dreams as if they were dramas being presented to them in sleep. When they wrote dream poetry and poetic prose, they used dream as a model and put the reader in a state as close as possible to the one they had experienced as dreamers.

Dream to the Romantics was more than just a nightly drama, however. Coleridge came to see it as a model for poetry in many different ways. He was interested in the dreamer's suspension of disbelief, as well as the similarities of dreaming with reading and composing literature. In his lectures he noticed that when reading *The Arabian Nights*, "there is the same activity of mind as in dreaming" (*CLL* 2: 191). The connections were so strong that dream was often aligned with, even taken to signify, similar processes of the imagination, as when Wordsworth says of the Wanderer, "In dreams, in study, and in ardent thought, / Thus was he reared."[4]

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[4] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 1: 301-2.

Dream had associations with thought, with daydreaming, reverie and especially with experiencing literature, whether it be reading, writing, or watching a play performed.

As such dream signified the state of imagining, the state of experiencing poetry. Keats says, "he's awake who thinks himself asleep" (*KL* 1: 233). Wordsworth agrees that dream may be an inner truth, a perfection in the mind: "I called on dreams and visions, to disclose / That which is veiled from waking thought."[5] It was an ideal that even poetry itself could not live up to. Shelley, in *A Defence of Poetry*, describes the way in which "Kubla Khan" and *The Fall of Hyperion* see the relationship between dream and poetry: "the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet" (697). Dream, in this respect, is defined in its relation to poetry, and poetry in its relation to dream. When in *The Fall of Hyperion* Keats struggles to distinguish the two, he finds himself tangled in a web of confusing definitions, and the role of the poet difficult to grasp. Keats said "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" (*KL* 1: 185), but in *The Fall* he acknowledges the selfishness of dream, and the need to share dreams through poetry. De Quincey agrees with the regretful yet necessary need to write his dreams: "farewell to peace of mind! farewell to hope and to tranquil dreams, and to the blessed consolations of sleep! for more than three years and a half I am summoned away from these: I am now arrived at an Iliad of woes: for I have now to record" (*DQ* 2: 61). Poetry is not dream, but, for the Romantics, "Poesy alone can tell her dreams" (*The Fall* 1: 8) in a way best fit to represent the ideal of dream. Dream was the vision within the imagination, which poetry sought to transform into language. Dream was everything

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[5] Wordsworth, *The Excursion,* 3: 686-87.

poetry could aspire to, though its freedom from language meant that it was a goal that poetry could never fully realize.

Although poetry could never exactly translate the original conception, dream poetry presented the Romantics with a form that gave them a heightened creative freedom in which they could emulate the dream. To the Romantics, dream was a visual experience, essentially non-verbal, that was thought to communicate through symbols and its interpretations to transcend cultures and even time.[6] It was very highly imaginative, even lawless, sensual and emotional. Dream was visionary, innate and eternal. By emulating the qualities of dream in poetry, the Romantics were able to create a highly imaginative, sensual poetry. The dream form gave them the freedom to create the wildest romances where an Arab is also a Quixotic knight, a shell both poetry and a god, and where an old root can transform into the corpse of what was once Rousseau. It provided the atmospheric climate to describe such elusive figures as the shape all light, and the surreal sounds of the echoing festivities of a fairy pinnace. Dream poetry presented the Romantics with a literary space in which they could appeal to the senses, in which the music of the poetry could have as much precedence as the imagery. It was a form that suggested itself as content – a form that by its very nature presented the landscape of the dreaming mind, that seemed ideal for poetry that sought to explore itself and its relation to dream. Dream poetry could emulate the dream, the poetic ideal, and as such it was, to the Romantics, the most poetic of poetry.

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[6] See Coleridge on the language of dreams: *CNB* 3: 4409.

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