Durham E-Theses

Coleridge and the rhetoric of power: the conflict between Coleridge's poetic theory and practice

Marcus Alexander Strub

NAME: MARCUS ALEXANDER STRUB

DEGREE: M.A.

YEAR OF SUBMISSION: 1995

TITLE: *COLERIDGE AND THE RHETORIC OF POWER: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN COLERIDGE'S POETIC THEORY AND PRACTICE.*

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the poetry of S.T. Coleridge in relation to his idealist theories of the poetic imagination. According to his various writings on the function of the imagination, the act of poesis ought to reflect the internal principles of creation as manifested in nature. The primary imagination, as Coleridge defines it in *Biographia Literaria*, speaks the language of God; the secondary imagination (the medium for poetic creativity) strives to imitate this universal power within the language of men. Poetry is thus understood as the vehicle which activates the "whole soul", moving man towards a sympathetic appreciation of the world he inhabits. However, as I intend to demonstrate, Coleridge's poetic language proves consistently inadequate in providing a constubstantiality between the mind and nature. The arbitrary nature of words often undermine the poet's intentions, ironically providing an outlet for repressed desires and fears. This is reflected strongly in the nature of poetic diction which often achieves an artistic fluidity at the expense of theoretical conviction. By contrast, when Coleridge's poetry remains faithful to his views, the language is often forced and stilted.

Modern critical theory, in its emphasis on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, can be useful in locating such a subversion of intended meaning within the romantic text. In my introduction, I shall discuss the generic term "romanticism" in relation to post-modernist literary theory in a manner which suggests that romantic discourse is already profoundly aware of inherent contradictions within its own creative process. Having established a correlation between romanticism and its twentieth century literary criticism, I shall investigate Coleridge's poetry in the terms of his own theory, which always suggests the duplicity of the literary imagination in its articulation of artistic distinctions (Imagination/Fancy; Imitation/Copy).

ABBREVIATIONS:

BL: Biographia Literaria.
CL: Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
CN: Collected Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
P.L: Paradise Lost.
SiR: Studies in Romanticism.
TWC: The Wordsworth Circle.

Contents

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Blake, William, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by W.H Stevenson, 2nd edn (London and New York: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1989).

Browning, Robert, *The Poems of Browning*, 2 vols, ed. by John Woolford and Daniel Karlin (London and New York: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1991).

Byron, George Gordon, Lord, *Don Juan*, ed. by T.G Steffan, E. Steffan, W.W. Pratt, reprint (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

Coleridge, S.T., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols, ed. by J. Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Coleridge, S.T., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, ed. by L. Patton and P. Mann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

Coleridge, S.T., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, 2 vols, ed. by R.A. Foakes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Coleridge, S.T., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table Talk*, ed. by C. Woodring (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Coleridge, S.T., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Aids to Reflection*, ed. by John Beer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Coleridge, S.T., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Friend*, 2 vols, ed. by B.E. Rooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

Coleridge, S.T., *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols, ed. by E.L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71).

Coleridge, S.T., *Collected Notebooks*, 3 double vols, ed. by K. Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957-90).

Coleridge, S.T., *Poetical Works*, ed. by E.H. Coleridge, revised (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

De Quincey, Thomas, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, ed. by A. Hayter, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1987).

De Quincey, Thomas, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. by D. Wright, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1988).

Eliot, T.S., "Tradition and the Individual Talent" [1919], in *The Oxford Anthology of Literature: Modern British Literature*, ed. by Frank Kermode and John Hollander (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Fichte, J.G., *Science of Knowledge* (1794), trans. by P. Heath and J. Lachs (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1970; Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Hartley, David, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, And his Expectations* (1749), Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2 vols in 1 (Gainsville, Fla., 1966).

Hazlitt, William, *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. by R. Blythe, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1985).

Hobbes, Thomas, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, 11 vols, ed. by W. Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839-45).

Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. by J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

Kant, Immanuel, *Critque of Pure Reason* (1788), trans. by N.K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929, rpt. 1982).

Keats, John, *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Miriam Allott (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1970).

Locke, John, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler, revised (London and New York: Longman Group Ltd, 1971).

Schelling, Friedrich, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. by P. Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978).

Scott, Walter Sir, *Selected Poems*, 2 vols, ed. by Thomas Crawford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, ed. by M. Hindle, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1988).

Shelley, P.B., *Poetical Works*, ed. by T. Hutchinson, 2nd edn, revised by G.M Matthews (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Shelley, P.B., *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Alasdair D.F. Macrae (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

Wilde, Oscar, *The Complete Works*, ed. by V. Holland, reprint (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1990).

Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude: a Parallel Text*, ed. by J.C. Maxwell, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1988).

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Abrams, M.H., *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971).

Alcorn, M.W., "Coleridge's Literary Use of Narcissism", *TWC*, 16 (1985), pp.13-32.

Barfield, Owen, *What Coleridge Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Bate, Walter Jackson, "Coleridge on the Function of Art", *Perspectives of Criticism*, xx (Cambridge: Mass., 1950).

Beer, John, "Coleridge and Wordsworth on Reflection", *TWC*, 20 (1989), pp.79-85.

Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Bygrave, Stephen, *Coleridge and the self: romantic egotism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).

Chayes, Irene, "'Kubla Khan' and the Creative Process", *SiR*, 6 1966, pp.1-22.

Christensen, Jerome, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Conrad, Peter, *The Everyman History of English Literature* (London and Melbourne: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1985).

Copley, S. and Whale, J., ed., *Beyond Romanticism: new approaches to texts and contexts, 1780-1832* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

3

Degrois, Denise, "Making the Absent Present: Self Portraits and Portraits of the Artist in Coleridge's Work", *TWC*, 20 (1991), pp.30-35.

De Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight: essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism*, 2nd edn, revised (1971; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology* [1967], trans. by G.C. Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974).

Dobree, Bonamy, ed., *The Oxford History of English Literature: The Early Eighteenth Century 1700-1740*, revised (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

Eagleton, Terry, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990).

Engell, James, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Mass., 1981).

Ferris, David, "Coleridge's Ventriloquy: The Abduction from the *Biographia*", *SiR*, 24 (1985), pp.41-84.

Fruman, Norman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (New York: George Braziller, 1971).

Galperin, William, "Coleridge and Critical Intervention", *TWC*, 20 (1991), pp.58-54 .

Gold, E.M., "Shelley's Prefatory Writing", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 36 (1987), pp.63-87.

Gravil, R. and Lefebure, M., ed., *The Coleridge Connection: essays for Thomas McFarland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

Gravil, R., Newlyn, L. and Roe, N., ed., *Coleridge's Imagination: essays in memory of Pete Laver* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Hamilton, Paul, *Coleridge's Poetics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

Hayter, Alethea, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1968).

Hill, John Spencer, *A Coleridge Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

Hilles, Frederick W. and Bloom, Harold, ed., *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Holmes, Richard, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1989).

Jang, Gyung-Ryul, "The Imagination *Beyond* and *Within* Language: An Understanding of Coleridge's Idea of Imagination", *SiR*, 25 (1986), pp.505-520.

Janowitz, Anne, "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric", *SiR*, 24 (1985), pp.21-39.

Jasper, David, *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985).

Jordan, F., *The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism*, 4th edn (Modern Language Association of America: New York, 1985).

Kipperman, Mark, *Beyond Enchantment: German Idealism and English Romantic Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

Kitson, Peter, "Coleridge, Milton and the Millennium", *TWC*, 18 (1987), pp.61-66.

Kitson, Peter, "Coleridge, the French Revolution, and 'The Ancient Mariner': Collective Guilt and Individual Salvation", *Yearbook of English Studies*, 19 (1989), pp.197-207.

Knoepflmacher, U.C., "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue", *Victorian Poetry*, 22 (1984), pp.139-159.

Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits - A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1977).

Langbaumm, Robert, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).

Leask, Nigel, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

Lockridge, Laurence, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Levinson, Marjorie, *The Romantic Fragment Poem* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

Luther, Susan, "'A Different Lore': Coleridge's 'The Nightingale'", *TWC*, 20 (1989), pp.91-97.

Magnuson, Paul, "'The Eolian Harp' in Context", *SiR*, 24 (1985), pp.3-20.

Mellor, Anne K., ed., *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

Mellor, Anne K., *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

McFarland, Thomas, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

McGann, Jerome, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

McKusick, James, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Miall, David, "Coleridge on Emotion: Experience into Theory", *TWC*, 22 (1991), pp.35-39.

Miall, David, "The Displacement of Emotions: The Case of 'Frost at Midnight'", *TWC*, 20 (1989), pp.97-102.

Mileur, Jean-Pierre, *Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Mudge, B.K., "'Excited by Trick': Coleridge and the Gothic Imagination", *TWC*, 22 (1991), pp.179-184.

Newlyn, Lucy, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Ober, W, "Southey, Coleridge, and 'Kubla Khan'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 58 (1959), pp.414-422.

O'Neill, Michael, "'A Being More Intense': Byron and Romantic Self-Consciousness", *TWC*, 22 (1991), pp.165-172.

Paley, Morton, "Apocalypse and Millennium in the Poetry of Coleridge", *TWC*, 23 (1992), pp.24-34.

Peterfreund, Stuart, "The Way of Immanence, Coleridge, and the Problem of Evil", *English Literary History*, 55 (1988), pp.125-158.

Piper, H.W., *The Singing of Mount Abora* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987).

Privateer, Paul, *Romantic Voices: identity and ideology in British poetry 1789-1850* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991).

Rajan, Tilottama, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).

Rajan, Tilottama, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990).

Rice, P. and Waugh, P., *Modern Literary Theory: a reader*, 2nd. edn (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1992).

Reed, Arden, ed., *Romanticism and Language* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1984).

Rosso, G.A. and Watkins, Daniel P., ed., *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990).

Simpson, David, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (Totowa and New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979).

Siskin, Clifford, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Smith, G.S., "A Reappraisal of the Moral Stanzas in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *SiR*, 3 (1963-4), pp.42-52.

Stillinger, Jack, "Pictorialism and Matter-of-Factness in Coleridge's Poems of Somerset", *TWC*, 20 (1989), pp.62-68.

Swingle, L.J., *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

Vlasopolos, Anca, "The Rime of the *Ancient Mariner* as Romantic Quest", *TWC*, 10 (1979), pp.365-370.

Walker, William, "Enlightened Nietzsche", *SiR*, 29 (1990), pp.39-69.

Wallen, Martin, "Return and Representation: The Revisions of 'The Ancient Mariner'", *TWC*, 17 (1986), pp.148-156.

Ward, Geoff, ed., *Romantic Literature From 1790 to 1830* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1993).

Warner, Marina, "Monstrous Monsters", *Independent*, 27 January 1994, p.25.

Wasserman, Earl, "The English Romantics, The Grounds of Knowledge", *SiR*, 4 (1964), pp.17-34.

Wheeler, Kathleen, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

Wheeler, Kathleen, "'Kubla Khan' and Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theories", *TWC*, 22 (1991), pp.15-24.

Wheeler, Kathleen, *Sources, processes and methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Woodman, Ross, "Nietzsche, Blake, Keats and Shelley: The Making of a Metaphorical Body", *SiR*, 29 (1990), pp.115-149.

Wylie, Ian, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

INTRODUCTION

I

In one of the most provocative essays of the age, Hazlitt writes:

> The imagination is an exaggerating and exclusive faculty: it takes from one thing to add to another: it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourite object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty: it judges of things not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations to one another. The one is a monopolising faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion; the other is a distributive faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty. The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast. It admits of no medium. It is every thing by excess. It rises above the ordinary standard of sufferings and crimes. It presents a dazzling appearance. It shows its head turretted, crowned, and crested. Its front is gilt and blood-stained. Before it 'it carries noise, and behind it leaves tears'. It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices. Kings, priests, nobles, are its train-bearers, tyrants and slaves its executioners.-'Carnage is its daughter'[1].

In his discussion of *Coriolanus* (1817), Hazlitt emphasises the ambivalent nature of the imagination, locating within its creative faculty a potentially despotic and authoritarian force. This deconstruction of the psychology of the imagination is shockingly anachronistic at a time when the sympathetic function of poetry was being emphasised in the British moral tradition. As Peter Conrad declares, "in England in particular, the literary imagination has aspired to renunciatory meekness and pastoral modesty. Hazlitt makes his principle the more rebarbative by enunciating it in the course of a defence of tyranny"[2].

Before one can begin to apply Hazlitt's incisive perceptions on the aggrandising nature of the imagination to the poetry of his own age, it is important to consider romantic poetry in the terms of what it set out to achieve. English romantic poetry is traditionally associated with the concept of emancipation on a mutiplicity of levels. In a literary sense the romantic movement is understood as the period of artistic licence; the first generation poets initiate the new age by freeing themselves from what they saw as the austere shackles of the age of Reason in their celebration of uninhibited creative thought. Socially the romantics emphasise the equality of human beings in their persistent attempts to reconcile man with "Nature". "Nature" is often represented in romantic poetry as an authentic and unrationalised Utopia, where the individual can escape from his or her own social or intellectual entrapment. Historically the movement coincides with the advent of the French Revolution which, in its radical transformation of a traditional feudal hierarchy, embodied the spirit of this new imaginative freedom.

The purpose of this thesis is, in the introductory chapter, to provide a framework of the key concept of "romantic imagination" as the pivotal medium through which the poets attempt to realise their various visionary paradises, and how the "divinity" of this exceptional gift is often tainted by the restrictions of their own humanity, and then to investigate these claims with specific attention to the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Like the French Revolution whose vision of universal freedom degenerates into the destructive "reign of terror", the romantics discover that poetic vision is an extemporaneous exercise, briefly allowing the poet a glimpse of its divinity only violently to revoke it. The careers of Wordsworth and Coleridge bear out this failure for, initially blessed with romantic imagination, they survive its death and become constant burdens, tied round the necks of the second generation romantics like Coleridge's albatross (the essayists- Hazlitt, Lamb and De Quincey -all begin by hero-worshipping their idols Wordsworth and Coleridge, before becoming more or less disillusioned). In attempting to pull down the barriers that hinder the workings of the imagination, the idealisation of the imagination in theory often leads to a sense of finitude in practice. Often the vision can only be preserved if the text is aborted and, more extremely, body and brain are recognised as the ultimate hindrance which encourage a discursive rather than intuitive form of knowledge. Idealisation is thus only maintained at the cost of extreme rhetorical manoeuvres (Coleridge, for example, omits a whole chapter in the *Biographia Literaria* in his attempts to provide an idealised account of the imagination).

If, as the romantics themselves suspect, language is an imperfect form that cannot fully represent their visions, their texts dramatise the equivocal nature of artistic creation. In fact, as Hazlitt saw, the texts often serve a rhetoric of power in their fluctuation between the antithetical poles of egotism and sympathy. Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" is a good example of the imagination's effective ambivalence as the poem fluctuates between multiple forms of unstable light imagery. The destructive force of imagination is emphasised by the procession of life which frequently degenerates into violent visions of darkness and, although the speaker recognises that the car which carries it is ill-guided, he must also tellingly confess that "it passed/With solemn speed majestically on" (105). Wordsworth's "Nutting" reveals similar attractions to images of power. The poem can be read as a mini-fall where the speaker is not Adam but Satan, finding himself for the first time in paradise "where the unpierced shade/Embrowned the noontide bowers" (*P.L:* IV 245-6). The sensuality of the description of nature, the feelings of exclusion, the mingled admiration, envy and the wish to brutalise make Wordsworth and Satan soul-mates. Blake even goes so far as to emphasise the patriarchal element of Nature (and by implication God) in "The Tyger" where he resonantly evokes the entrancing magnificence of power. As these instances suggest, the romantics themselves were often ambivalent about imaginative processes. In retrospect for us it may become increasingly difficult to distinguish the revolutionary motivation of a Shelley from the language of sensation and power that one might associate with Nietzsche or Hazlitt's Coriolanus. In aesthetical terms the demarcating boundary between two opposing political viewpoints can become confusingly blurred for both derive their inspirational focus from the same imaginative source. Eagleton highlights this dyadic aspect of romantic aesthetics, arguing that the Utopian idealism which manifests itself in the period as a reaction against traditional hierarchy, eventually comes "to represent a devastating loss for the political left". The "intuitive dogmatism of the imagination"[3], and "the intimidatory majesty of the sublime"[4] can equally be seen to localise themselves in right-wing ideology. The romantic imagination enforces a Foucaultian recognition that aesthetic categories and political power are inextricably related.

The implications of the imagination's embryonic political ambivalence become crucial when focusing on questions of ideology because they highlight the intensely equivocal nature of these phenomena we name "Romantic" in a way that renders simple definitions of "Romanticism" impossible. M.H Abrams's critical survey *Natural Supernaturalism* defines romanticism as a humanisation of theological tradition and as a movement towards an enthusiastic organic unity in which political opposites are sublimated by romantic reconciliation:

> The Romantic writers neither sought to demolish their life in this world in a desperate search for
> something new nor lashed out in despair against the inherited culture. The burden of what they had to
> say was that contemporary man can redeem himself and his world, and that his only way to this end is
> to reclaim and bring to realization the great positives of the Western Past[5].

Abrams presents the self-image of romantic idealism by replicating its fundamental organicism in his own critical methodology. However, as McGann explains, Abrams's reification of "certain key romantic self-conceptualisations like 'spirituality', 'creativity', 'process', 'uniqueness', 'diversity'...cannot be taken at face value. They lie at the very heart of romanticism's self-representation and as such they must be subjected to critical analysis"[6]. Abrams's argument becomes unstuck in his deliberate omission of Byron, absent "not because I think him a lesser poet than the others but because in his greatest work he speaks with an ironic counter-voice and deliberately opens a satirical perspective on the vatic stance of his romantic contemporaries"[7]. In selectively ignoring Byron, Abrams's notion of romanticism is immediately complicated in its confession of absences that threaten the coherence of his own perception of the romantic.

Subsequent surveys of romanticism attempt to revise the traditional humanist approaches, focusing instead on the fundamental concept of "Romantic Irony". Drawing upon the theories of the German ironist Friedrich Schlegel as a paradigmatic model, Mellor offers an alternative theory of romantic practice:

> The authentic romantic ironist is as filled with enthusiasm as with skepticism. He is as much a
> romantic as an ironist. Having ironically acknowledged the fictiveness of his own patternings of human
> experience, he romantically engages in the creative process of life by eagerly constituting new forms,
> new myths. And these new fictions and self-concepts bear with them the seeds of their own
> destruction. They too die to give way to new patterns, in a never-ending process that becomes an
> analogue for life itself. The resultant artistic mode that alone can properly be called romantic irony
> must therefore be a form or structure that simultaneously creates and de-creates itself[8].

But while Mellor might acknowledge a fundamental scepticism in the romantic creative process, she continues to assert that Romantic Irony becomes incoherent as a programme when creative enthusiasm is disrupted by the eventuation of the negative emotions of fear and guilt. At this point, so Mellor continues, we move away from romanticism into the realms of "something else": "the

romantic ironist's enthusiastic response to process and change terminates where the perception of a chaotic universe arouses either guilt or fear"[9], and hence challenges the ideology of open-ended spiritual growth. Mellor's sceptical approach to romanticism ironically suffers from her own wariness of non-enthusiastic creativity. Her celebratory fertile romantic universe merely extends traditional humanist studies in order to incorporate the ironic stance of the previously unaccountable Byron. Mellor's comment on Byron, that "the philosophical ironist who successfully performs this difficult manoeuvering between enthusiastic self-creation and skeptical self-destruction, produces that self-expanding, 'progressive universal poetry' which Schlegel hailed as the only genuinely 'romantic poetry'"[10], illustrates the dangers of fully assimilating the English romantic movement with the transcendental philosophies of its German counterpart because it ignores the more negative aspects of romantic creation that threaten to destroy a poet's idealistic intentions. The presence of the desperate emotions of fear and guilt further complicate the subject of romanticism as they are essential responses that hint at the darker, power-grasping facets of the imagination.

In this light we may be confronted with an ambivalence so profound that it is inappropriate to separate, as Swingle does, theories of romanticism into "ideological" and "anti-ideological" components:

> Were the Romantics fundamentally interested in articulating systems of belief- as, for example, a philosophy of organicism, a theory of the creative imagination, an epistemology grounded in the primacy of heart over head? Or were they, to the contrary, fundamentally dubious about such beliefs and interested, instead, in pursuing the questions that appear to militate against an ideological orientation of thought?[11]

Such a question neglects the possibility that romanticism forms a far more discursive and complex ideology in which apparently disparate romantic theories synchronically interact with one another.

In this respect modern deconstructionist criticism can be helpful in highlighting romantic ambivalence if it is used as a methodological tool for a more historically particular analysis. This critical movement emphasises, in its radical interpretation of Saussurean linguistics, a dissemination of meaning that afflicts all texts at all times 'a priori': meaning cannot be fixed to preconceived essences, but can only be articulated in difference because "In language there are only differences *without positive terms*"[12]. But while Saussure proposes that language stabilises arbitrary identities, creating a "total sign", deconstruction challenges the construction of a definitive ideology in language by suggesting that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is also arbitrary. In the words of Roland Barthes: "we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash"[13]. Deconstructionist techniques are useful in locating arcane power conflicts in the romantic imagination because they displace notions of the central authority in the text, bringing to the attention of the reader the margins and subtexts which often prove to be equally as important. T. Rajan emphasises the importance of breaking down logocentric conservatism in romantic writing, arguing that meaning is subjected to a dissemination that undermines the supposed organic unity of the text: "The history of Romantic poetry and aesthetics can be seen as the gradual bringing to light of a counterplot within

the apparently utopian narrative of Romantic desire, through the confrontation of recognitions initially hidden in the subtexts rather than the texts of works"[14].

McGann, however, objects to the deconstructionist approach to literature, arguing that its ahistorical process obscures the historical distinctions that can ultimately distinguish the romantic from other literature. McGann might be correct in his assertion that it is a general misconception to imagine that romantic poetry transcends the social, the political and the historical, but his insistence (based on Heine's model of historical self-consciousness) that the romantic position is an "historically limited and determinate one"[15] immediately poses the problem of escaping from the "false-consciousness" of one ideology only to plunge headlong into the limits of an alternative ideological position. In other words it is naive to assume that we can simply step outside romanticism. McGann affirms that "a critical procedure like Heine's undermines an ideological and reifying criticism by isolating and historicising the originary forms of thought, by placing an intellectual gulf between the present and the past"[16]. This, however, will not do because it ignores the fact that our own current historical awareness is the direct result of a process that continuously reacts and interacts with past historical assumption. Of course this is not to say that history forms a continuum that is free from contradiction or breakdown; rather it suggests that the ruptures which do occur are a direct result of an historical discourse that is aligned with a power that may be oppressive, and which indeed involves the poet in discrediting or revaluing the literature that has preceded him. In his critique of McGann's historical isolation of the romantic period Siskin justifiably states that "Literature as the discipline we study and know...invented and was the invention of a self that both uses it to establish hierarchical difference and requires it as a cure"[17]. By historically isolating the romantic period, McGann deprives romanticism of its authority to perform the inherently romantic characteristic of a literary iconoclasm; a characteristic that reveals intensified monopolising and aggrandising tendencies in the literature of the period, in spite of romanticism's own ideological commitments.

In romanticism's attempt to discover a poetry which will reflect a universal and eternal notion of truth, romantic ambivalence manifests itself in the movement's attempts historically to isolate itself from other forms of literature. In this light, Bloom's supposedly ahistorical "anxieties" can be viewed alternatively as the inevitable historical process of a literature utilising its "present" power over past literature in order to formulate new values and perspectives. The self-questing nature of the romantic consciousness is, according to Bloom, doomed to failure because it is always at war with its literary progenitors and with its siblings. The myth of an exclusively romantic "self" is an impossible ideal because "self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness"[18]. This becomes explicit in the manner in which the romantic poets attempt to free themselves from the influence of Milton. Romantic poetry abounds with allusions to Milton as the poets deliberately misread, outwrite, rewrite and pervert their epic predecessor, in a desire to appear "original". If the romantic imagination simultaneously performs both an historical and an ahistorical function, it also suggests that these may be inseparably caught up in each other's processes. Simpson explains this by suggesting that the romantics "were aware of exactly the problems we now discuss under the heading of 'hermeneutics'" and "that they used the paradoxes implicit in them to fashion a discourse based on transference, repetition, and the 'doublebind'"[19].

Deconstructionists may claim then, as Rajan does, that their own critical methodology is already pre-empted by Romantic practice and is not an alien or ahistoric form of discourse. This is perhaps emphasised in romanticism's relation to subsequent literary movements which claim to reject romantic theories of art. T.S. Eliot's essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', was composed as a

deliberate response to romantic subjectivism, insisting that poetry has nothing to do with the expression of emotion, and comparing the poet's mind to a "receptacle" within which "special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations"[20]. Eliot claims that the act of composition, far from being an expression of a complex individuality, ought to be an impersonal process where the self is extinguished by the embodiment of Tradition which reflexively articulates itself within the text:

> What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality[21].

However, it is ironically from the very school he attacks that Eliot formulates his own aesthetics. The romantic imagination is perceived, by the very poets themselves, as an external presence which insouciantly possesses the artist, leaving him/her at the mercy of impersonal forces which are beyond his control (see the extract from Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* below). As the central artistic theorist of his age, Coleridge understands the imagination as both an active and a passive entity which serves as a fulcrum between internal and external perception. Here, the self-consciousness that Eliot objects to, is ultimately neutralised by an absolute transcendental version of the self which negates identity: "We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in God" (*BL* I: 283). The same perceived shift from subjectivity to objectivity is evident in Eliot's own poetic theory when he comments that "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones", enabling Eliot to conclude that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality"[22]. In both cases the artists are concerned with the tense relationship between identity and literature. In both cases it is similarly the ambiguous nature of language which undermines their theories in practice. Just as Eliot's repression of the ego in art only serves to resurrect it, arguably greater than ever in his own verse, Coleridge's poetic practice, as I will argue, becomes a haven for a manic subjectivity.

The romantics' scepticism concerning the ability of words to convey an exact meaning makes them the forerunners of some aspects of modern critical theory. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* implicitly laments the fracturing of the signifier and the signified which results in the locus of meaning being shifted away from the text to the elusive process it is taken to transmit:

> A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry". The greatest poet even cannot say it; for 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[23].

14

Shelley confesses here to a dissemination of meaning endemic to composition that has the dubious effect of destroying the unity of conception. This produces, what Rajan terms " the disappearance of narrative, dramatic, or conceptual 'actualisation', a phenomenon that results in the absence from romantic writing of embodied or achieved meaning as opposed to discarnate meaning"[24]. That is to say meaning is increasingly something in need of being reconstructed. Logocentric organicism thus threatens to dissolve into a structureless mess of floating signifiers and signifieds, where meaning becomes open and wholly dependent on the play of language and an appeal to the reader for completion.

Idealising critics who believe that language is essentially a mimetic and stable entity that forms a relationship of correspondence between the mind and the world, subject and object, cannot have fully acknowledged the implications of Shelley's enquiry into the nature of words which suggests that the centre of organic thought is immediately displaced in composition. Egalitarian idealism, therefore, may be distorted in its textual representation because the damaged relationship between thought and articulation will always provide other meanings that may contradict the author's intentions[25]. The work of Jacques Lacan may be helpful in situating notions of autonomous individuality in Romantic theory (most evident in Wordsworth and Coleridge rather than Shelley who does not defend a view of the autonomy of the individual in creative processes at least) as a form of psychic fantasy. According to Lacan language can only dismantle the idealised synthesis of subject and object within poetic form. Lacan explains the disruptive influence of language in his famous example of an infant who, before his acquisition of linguistic communication, undergoes the "mirror stage". In recognising his own image in the mirror, the uncoordinated child begins to identify with a unified image of itself:

> This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject[26].

This imaginary correspondence of self and not-self, subject and object, creates an illusory sense of control and stability which is disrupted by the child's entrance into the system of language. Here identity is dependent on difference rather than an imaginary self-identification. Language thus contributes to the fragmentation of the self by creating desire and the unconscious which become repressed subtexts when the subject assumes the pre-defined positions that are available to him in language:

> the formation of the *I* is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium-its inner arena and enclosure surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle whose form (sometimes juxtaposed in the same scenario) symbolizes the id...Similarly, on the mental plane, we find realized the structures of fortified works, the metaphor of which arises spontaneously, as if issuing from the symptoms themselves, to designate the mechanisms of obsessional neurosis-inversion, isolation, reduplication, cancellation and displacement[27].

15

Lacan's analysis of language's disclosure of repressed fantasies is illuminating in relation to romantic presentations of organic unity because it reveals how the intended fusion of subject and object is an imaginary ideal which is undermined by the vision's linguistic figuration. Quite often in romantic texts imagination can be interpreted as the imposition of a fantasy that would deny its own fractured rendition of being.

In this respect the application of feminist criticism to romantic texts is particularly illuminating because it can also demonstrate another aspect of romantic ambivalence in its questioning of the theoretical conception of a unified self in language. The French feminist movement is of relevance here because, in the words of Mellor:

> It originated in the attempt to call into question, even deny, the validity of the binary mode of thinking that has characterized philosophical discourse since the ancient Greeks. The dualism inherent in Western thought, whether conceived in terms of the Greek opposition between techne/physis, or the Cartesian mind/body split, or the Kantian subject/object (ding-an-sich), or the Hegelian dialectic of thesis/antithesis, or-most crucially for feminist theorists-the difference of male/female, enforced a cultural practice that could only produce the repression and exploitation of the Other, be it the other class, the other race, the other sex. French philosophers and psychoanalysts have insisted that one can eliminate social oppression only by first eliminating binary rational thinking. In particular, French feminist theorists have insisted that the cultural practice of troping the female as Other, as that which is opposed to mind/subject/techne, must be radically altered[28].

The romantics view the female values of mothering and sympathy as essential to their conception of the imagination as a benevolent and (in some cases) androgynous entity. However, the role of the female Other within romantic verse may reveal two distinctive ways in which the text may be taken to deconstruct its vision of unified harmony and questions the imagination's status as a reconciler of opposites. In the first place, as critics have pointed out, the desire to fill the void of a solitary male ego with the sympathetic tendencies of a female psyche often reveals the colonising tendencies of the romantic imagination[29]. The romantic ego thus may be envisaged as a potently male power which appropriates its female counterpart as a function of its own subjectivity. Marlon B. Ross emphasises this by understanding the romantic experience in the terms of an explicitly male ego which becomes engaged in figurative battles of possession and conquest:

> The self-questing of the Romantic poet enacts the attempt to reestablish a relation with-a hold on-the world, a relation that is predetermined by the nature of the historical changes that envelope and transform the poetic vocation itself. The Romantics resort to masculine metaphors of power not only because they are socialized and indoctrinated into a masculinist tradition but also (and tautologically) because these metaphors allow them to reassert the power of a vocation that is on the verge of losing whatever influence it had within and over that tradition[30].

Browning's post-romantic poem 'Porphyria's Lover' (1842) is particularly illuminating in this respect because it provides an ironic exposition of the romantic male speaker's futile attempts mentally to possess a Female Other[31]. The poem dramatises the inescapable subjectivity of a romantic speaker who, in his search for an objective counterpart, can only confirm the totalising nature of his masculine imagination. Browning presents a speaker who, fearful of the inconstancy

of the female's subjective desires, waits for the moment in which he can deprive her of her animation. The speaker transforms his beloved into the status of an object, thereby hoping to secure her love and distance himself from the intense subjectivity of his own emotion: his love impersonally manifests itself as "A thing to do" (38). The act of murder can only violently reassert his self-possession for he now imposes his own mental processes on a mind whose inconstancy he had earlier feared. The lover's mind assumes the "exclusive and exaggerating" function that Hazlitt ascribes to the self-conscious romantic imagination: transformed into an "it", Porphyria's head no longer moves of its own accord-"its' will", rather, is that of her subjective interpreter. Porphyria's inanimate body becomes a work of art, a poem in itself that confirms the creativity of the masculine ego:

> I propped her head up as before,
> Only, this time *my* shoulder bore
> Her head, which droops upon it still:
> The smiling rosy little head,
> So glad it has its utmost will,
> That all it scorned at once is fled,
> And I, its love, am gained instead!   (49-55)

The egocentric speaker has reduced his female counterpart into an image of male fantasy whereby she is now animated only by the demands of a controlling masculine power.

Knoepflmacher emphasises the influence of Coleridgean antecedents in the poem: "Unable to find fuel in 'that inanimate cold world' his imagination projects, Coleridge's agonised speaker [of 'Dejection: an Ode'] seeks vainly to remove the 'viper thoughts, that coil around my mind' by listening 'to the wind' (ll. 51, 94); Porphyria's Lover, beset by similar anxieties, prefers to relieve his agony by coiling his thoughts around Porphyria's 'little throat'"[32]. With respect to a poet like Coleridge it may suggest that the source of supposedly divine inspiration is an intrinsically male source which is at once dominant and creative. The imaginative paradise in 'Kubla Khan' combines an image of masculine, ejaculative power (the mighty river Alph) with an image of female servitude (the wailing woman). The desire to incorporate female attributes within a male ego serves to intensify the problem of a radical gender opposition rather than promote a vision of androgynous harmony. The damsel of the poem's closing lines might be seen to reject her appropriation into a male paradise of satiated desire and, in doing so, fractures the unity of the vision by revealing its subversive element of male domination.

A second strategy with the feminine Otherness in romantic poetry is mythically to assimilate the female with the duplicitous Eve of both Biblical and literary ill-repute. Marina Warner emphasises the female's figuration within literary history as a diabolic monster beneath a beautiful exterior:

> Male beasts, as in *Beauty and the Beast*, or male devils, as in the temptations of St Antony, don't possess the same degree of duplicity; you can tell you're dealing with the devil on the whole, but when evil comes in the female guise, you have to beware: the fairy queen may turn to dust in your arms, and poisonous dust at that. This is a trope that sends thrills through stories as disparate as Wagner's *Tannhauser*, in which the knight loses his soul to the carnal goddess of the Venusberg, and Rider

Haggard's *She*, where, as you might remember from the film, Ursula Andress cracks open like a speeded-up earthquake and reveals beneath the image of loveliness, nothing but a crumbling hag. But none of these dissembling serpents and she-monsters can compare with the vision of Lamia in Keat's gorgeous romance noir:

> *She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue*
> *Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;*
> *Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,*
> *Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson-barred;*
> *And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,*
> *Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed*
> *Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries...*
> *She seemed, at once, some penanced lady elf,*
> *Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self...*
> *Her head was a serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!*
> *She had a woman's mouth, with all its pearls complete...*
> *Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake*
> *Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake.*[33]

The female is often figured within romantic texts as the source of postlapsarian duplicity. Her mythical associations make her a convenient scapegoat for the masculine poet's own sense of guilt and inadequacy. Unable to create a vision of Edenic harmony within his own poetry, the masculine speaker transfers his intense desires of self-fulfilment on to the unsuspecting female; she can conveniently account for the distortion of the womanly qualities of sympathy and empathy into monstrous aberrations of masculine self-pursuit within her own mythical figuration as the initial deceiver. For Coleridge the androgynous male is the source of divine creativity, producing the mighty fountain of the river Alph in 'Kubla Khan' in an image that is powerfully ejaculative. The potentially androgynous female, on the other hand, recurs again and again as an image of horror that plagues Coleridge's nightmares: the ghastly Life-in-Death of 'The Ancient Mariner', and the lamia-like Geraldine of 'Christabel'. The impetuous desire to seek an objective Eve in order to enrich the meaning of the solitary Adamic self ultimately only serves to intensify the subjective nature of the fallen speaker.

III

Let us now turn, with these pictures of ambivalence in mind, to Coleridge in particular. As both a poet and a literary theorist Coleridge uniquely provides the opportunity for the modern reader to understand romantic poetry in the terms of its own theory. Coleridge's poetic theory attempts to idealise the literary imagination as a medium which can provide the basis for a poetry that speaks the divine language of God. Instrumental to the success of this sympathetic function of the imagination in practice is the significance of language itself. From the very outset of his philosophical career Coleridge rejects the idea of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and seeks to restore the 'natural'' meaning of words[34]. As I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter,

18

Coleridge fails to produce a theory of language that will justify the divine function that he reserves for the literary imagination. The tense and unstable conjunction between the imagination and language in Coleridge's theory, highlights poetic form's susceptibility to the ambivalences of interpretation as previously discussed.

Coleridge's theory of the imagination reaches fruition in his 1817 *Biographia Literaria* definition. Here he argues that through an act of self-awareness, the imagination can synthesise the subject and object through the structure of artistic creation. Through the medium of art, the self surrenders itself to the objective principles behind creation itself provoking a consubstantiality of mind (subjective experience) and nature (objective experience):

> The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be 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. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves , diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (*BL*: I 304)

This most commonly quoted passage from *Biographia Literaria* has been continually argued over and re-interpreted, but in the words of Jonathan Wordsworth: "with the primary imagination, man unknowingly reenacts God's original and eternal creative moment; with the secondary, he consciously vitalizes an object-world that would otherwise be dead; with the fancy he plays unvital games, dependent upon choice and the laws of association"[35]. The primary imagination is the faculty which unconsciously hypostasizes the external world via a passive act of perception. The primary imagination speaks the language of God as manifested in natural phenomena. Its univocal status requires no explanation, and it is wholly disconnected from the world of art. The secondary imagination, on the other hand, is a human faculty which functions within human language; it seeks to comprehend the language of God by a conscious act of progressive awareness, not only by mirroring its divine perceptive process, but by discovering what might be called its laws of generative grammar. According to Coleridge the poet must rely not on the primary imagination's rendering of the objective, physical world but on the secondary imagination's rendering of an intimate human relationship with that world.

If the primary imagination allies itself with the powers of the deity, continuously recreating the natural world, the secondary imagination can only be by comparison, an inferior entity. Coleridge hardly emphasises this gap in his *Biographia* definition, where the secondary imagination (and by implication, the poet) is elevated to an almost identical divine status. This discrepency in distinction between the two faculties of imagination is pointed out by Jackson Bate: "the primary imagination is rather the highest exertion of the imagination that the 'finite mind' has to offer; and its scope...necessarily includes universals which lie beyond the restricted field of the 'secondary' imagination. For the appointed task of the 'secondary' imagination is to 'idealize and unify' its objects; and it can hardly 'unify' the universals"[36]. This is emphasised by the syntax and content of Coleridge's prose which dramatises a shift in language that diminishes the eminence of the secondary imagination. The wonderfully simple and fluent description of the primary faculty is

replaced, in the affirmation of the secondary, by a complicated grammar of laboured consecutive clauses. The series of negatives that accompany these lines convey a sense of absence rather than totality: "echo... degree... impossible... struggles". The unified narrative of the primary imagination speaks for itself; the disrupted narrative of the secondary, however, requires qualification after qualification.

The secondary imagination thus, in its continual self-justifications, disregards the Plotinian admonition quoted in Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria*:

> it is not lawful to enquire from whence it [nature] sprang, as if it were a thing subject to place and motion, for it neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place; but it either appears to us or it does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us; preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle as the eye waits patiently for the rising sun. (*BL*: I 241)

Although the theory of the secondary imagination is part of a defence of a transcendentally grounded notion of natural language, Coleridge does not provide, along with his definition of imagination, his theory of how human language can be heightened by the imagination. The *Logosophia*, which he refers to in chapter XII of the *Biographia*, remains the missing link which can vindicate his theory of imagination in practice. Without it the discovery of primary knowledge via self-conscious contemplation can only subject the univocal silence of divine language to the rupturing garrulity of art, which fractures the relationship between sign and referent. The secondary agency, as a result, becomes potentially promethean for it is an image-making power that can transform the world according to an individual's whim or fantasy[37]. Language offers its speaker the medium to create an other universe via the secondary imagination. In Coleridge's hands the poetic imagination often becomes a potentially disruptive violence on the primary imagination. In this respect Robert Langbaum's assertion that the romantic experience consists of a desperate "movement towards objectivity" for which "subjectivity was...the inescapable condition"[38], encapsulates the situation of a poet like Coleridge. As we shall see, the intended resolution of the subject/object opposition in his poetic theory is undermined in poetic practice by language's mediation for the plight of an individual ego "isolated within himself", bereft of an "objective counterpart"[39] for his explicitly subjective desires.

As a power which can only realise its full potential within the boundaries of language, Coleridge's poetic imagination is doomed to commit itself to the inevitability of error: his definition of imagination ironically reveals itself in the flawed words and stubborn sounds of the philosophically imperfect. This is emphasised in the *Biographia* definition by the rejection of the fancy as a mode of writing unfit for true artistic presentation. The fancy is defined as "a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association" (*BL*: I 305). In this sense it is both limited and dangerous; limited because it can only play with "fixities and definites"; dangerous because it has the capacity to run riot, destroying true poetry. It is, of course, with the fancy's origins in the principles of association that Coleridge initially embarks upon his theory of imagination. In his early formulations of the poetic imagination Coleridge draws

upon the theories of Hartley who stresses the need to restore the original, prelapsarian state of natural speech, where all concepts can be expressed unequivocally:

> If all the simple articulate sounds, with all the radical words, which are found in the present languages, were appropriated to objects and ideas agreeable to the present sense of words, and their fitness to represent objects and ideas, so as to make all consistent with itself; if, farther, the best rules of etymology and syntax were selected from the present languages, and applied to the radical words here spoken of so as to render them capable of expressing all the variations in objects and ideas, as far as possible, i.e. so as to grow proportionably to the growth of knowledge, this might also be termed a philosophical language...   (*Observations on Man*, i. 316-7)

Hartley's theories became, for the young Coleridge, the basis of a philosophical language which allows the epistomologist to take the all important step from mere perceiver of nature, to interpreter of its laws and agencies. Hartley explains this differentiation in his *Observations* through his theory of mental images or ideas which become templates for the impressions of the natural world. On the flyleaf to his copy, as Wylie notes, Coleridge faithfully writes: "Ideas may become as vivid & distinct, & the feelings accompanying them as vivid, as original Impressions-and this may finally make a man independent of his senses-one use of poetry"[40]. Coleridge is here already making a hierachical distinction between two faculties: "Original Impressions" and "Ideas". He is also suggesting that ideas can merge into original impressions in a poetry of natural speech. Ideas, in this sense, represent an early formulation of the secondary imagination; there is even the similar hint of ambiguity, implicit in the word "may", in respect to its unifying powers.

Coleridge, however, later repudiated Hartley's system of Ideas on account of its rigorous adhesion to mechanical association. Although Hartley's association led to a final spirituality in the constant refining of the senses, it was the idea that the imagination ultimately had its origins in the senses that Coleridge found unpalatable:

> Now it will be a sufficient proof, that all the intellectual pleasures and pains are deducible ultimately from the sensible ones...For thus none of the intellectual pleasures and pains are evidently originals. They are therefore the only ones, i.e. they are the common source from whence all the intellectual pleasures and pains are ultimately derived.   (*Observations* i. 416-7)

Although Hartley went on to stress the religious or transcendent telos of the process of association, for Coleridge imagination, in Hartley's sense, remains an ambivalent faculty that proves unable to transcend the limits of the body. However, as I intend to argue, Coleridge does not wholly succeed in surpassing Hartley's theories and they become unsurmounted subtexts in the *Biographia* definition of the imagination. I shall suggest that Coleridge confuses what he perceives as the imperfections of a philosophical theory, with the imperfections of language which can reveal the particular desires and neuroses that prevent the potential for complete or total vision. The fancy is thus an intrinsic element of the imagination, despite Coleridge's attempts to alienate it from his idealised version of perceptive faculty.

Chapters VI and VII of the *Biographia* attempt to finalise Hartley's influence as a particular period in Coleridge's own intellectual development. The law of association, restricted to a

"common condition" of contemporaneity, reduces the voluntary will to the passive automatism of a "memoria technica". However, in the most important passage of chapter VII, Coleridge confesses the significance of the passive faculty of the mind which plays an intrinsic role in his overall conception of the imagination as a trichotomy of active thought, the passive thing, and the intermediate faculty:

> Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with the prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed, how the little animal *wins* its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION... (*BL*: I 124-5)

The passive faculty of the mind, which Coleridge understands as an act of sense-perception, confirms a world already imbued with imaginative life by mechanically reproducing its external presence; the active faculty insists that this imaginative force is created by a voluntary act of perception. This bears witness to the mind's independence of nature-in other words, one can "imagine" an image of nature even though the object itself is not present in time and space. The intermediate faculty, on the other hand, can reconcile the active and the passive even if the two "are in necessary antithesis" (*BL*: I 255).

If the conscious will is to function as the lynch-pin in Coleridge's elevation of the secondary imagination, then it must be disassociated from the accidental passivity of the fancy. An ambivalence of opinion is already apparent in chapter VII in a lengthy passage where the speaker attempts to reduce association to a common condition of contemporaneity:

> But if we appeal to our own consciousness, we shall find that even *time* itself, as the *cause* of a *particular* act of association, is distinct from contemporaneity, as the *condition* of *all* association. Seeing a mackarel it may happen, that I immediately think of gooseberries, because I at the same time ate mackarel with gooseberries as the sauce. The first syllable of the latter word, being that which had co-existed with the image of the bird so called, I may then think of a goose. In the next moment the image of a swan may arise before me, though I had never seen the two birds together. In the two former instances, I am conscious that their co-existence in *time* was the circumstance, that enabled me to recollect them; and equally conscious am I, that the latter was recalled to me by the joint operation of likeness and contrast. So it is with *cause* and *effect*, so too with *order*. So am I able to distinguish whether it was proximity in time, or continuity in space, that occasioned me to recall B on the mention of A. They cannot be indeed *separated* from contemporaneity; for that would be to separate them from the mind itself. (*BL*: I 125-6)

Coleridge argues that contemporaneity enslaves the mind to a passive association of external objects, yet simultaneously he recognises that the workings of consciousness cannot be emancipated from such a contemporaneity. From a deconstructionist viewpoint, as Jerome Christensen argues, the final sentence implies that "the notion of an integral consciousness (the

22

ego, the self which is somewhere present to itself) depends on the premise of the contemporaneity of the mind-the temporal identity within itself. Hence it would appear that it is *essentially* accurate in respect to Coleridge's own ontology to hold the contemporaneity of the mind as the *condition* and final *cause* of all acts of the mind"[41]. In other words Coleridge understands that contemporaneity must be repudiated if the epistemologist is to progress beyond necessitarian association, yet such a rejection would also involve a confession of a constitutive or deconstitutive difference which would threaten the absolute unity of being.

This, of course, has severe consequences for the importance which Coleridge places on the human will in his forthcoming theory of the imagination. Coleridge thus, in chapter XIII, suppresses the threat of association by isolating it as a faculty separate and distinct from the imagination. This shifts the balance of his initial conception of the mind as a trichotomy of a passive and active agency brought into consubstantiality by an intermediate faculty. The trichotomy presented in chapter XIII is, on the other hand, elitist and unstable, neatly side-stepping, by mere fiat, the issue of fancy as an intrinsic facet of imagination by alienating it from the more advanced components of the mind.

The idealisation of the poetic imagination thus develops into a tension between monism and dualism which haunts the parameters of the *Biographia*. On the one hand Coleridge recognises the importance of passive association as a faculty which must be reconciled or balanced in order to confirm the totality of the imagination, yet on the other hand he realises the possible threat it can pose to the act of imaginative perception which must rely heavily upon an active motivation of the conscious will. In upholding the latter proposal, Coleridge's conception of the secondary imagination contains, in its definition, a time-bomb which threatens to explode its unifying powers at any given moment. Just as the secondary imagination, as Coleridge hopes can merge into the primary, creating, in the words of Wordsworth, "The vision and faculty divine" (*BL*: I 241), so too can it be invaded by the deconstructive agency of fancy. As a discursive and interrogatory knowledge rather than an intuitive one, the secondary imagination is infected continually by the duplicity of language. Within language's system of arbitrary signs the imagination can lose its "superior voluntary controul" (*BL*: I 125) and be subjected to the lawlessness of fancy which, hovering dangerously in the margins, realises its potential as a deconstructive subtext. The two powers, far from remaining disparate or alienated, are co-existent and interchangeable.

The slippage in language from the spiritual mimesis of the Absolute to the desires and demands of a conditioned, finite self enacts a duplicity in the literary imagination. The fragile Fancy/Imagination distinction thus conceals a fear that the aesthetic is, to its very roots, potentially elitist and powerful; a domain where the self can reign supreme. Such an irreversible dichotomy between the rhetorical and conceptual dimensions of consciousness, from the empiricist philosophy to Coleridgean epistemology, can be best understood, as William Walker explains, in Nietzsche's tropological critique of metaphysics:

> Because the notion of a self and the notion of an object or thing confronted, recognized, or known by this self are victims of this rhetorical critique, the subject/object dualism of empiricist epistemology is of course abrogated, or at least reduced to the illusory effect of figural power. The move from empiricist epistemology to Nietzschean rhetoric results in the liquidation of the conceptual premises and investments of the former, and permits a radical reformulation of the main problems and insights of romantic literature[42].

Walker argues, through the mediatory influence of de Man, that Nietzsche's model of trope and concept refines associationist theories of the mind and language so that "in one crucial respect, the move from empiricism to Nietzsche is no move at all"[43].

Nietzsche's notion that "All *rhetorical figures* (i.e. the essence of language) are *logically erroneous reasonings [logische FelschluBe]*" [44] evokes Hartley's description of language as compromiser of deivant or "radical" words. But whereas Hartley mistakenly believes that language can be etymologically purified so that images and ideas can stand in a direct relationship to one another, Nietzsche emphatically demonstrates that the processes of the mind are explicitly metaphorical or "anthropomorphic":

> We produce beings [*Wesen*] as *bearers of properties* [*Träger der Eigenschaften*] and abstractions [Abstracktionen] as causes of these properties. That a unity [*Einheit*], a tree, for example, appears to us as a multiplicity of properties, of relations, is anthropomorphic in two respects [*ist in doppelter Weise anthropomorphisch*]: first, this demarcated unity "tree" does not exist; it is arbitrary to cut out [*herauszuschneiden*] a thing in this way (according to the eye, according to the form); this relation is not the true, absolute relation, but is again tainted by anthropomorphism [*anthropomorphisch gefarbt*][45].

Coleridge, of course, subsumes the empiricist notion of ideas into a would be transcendental theory of imagination. But the Nietzschean revaluing of associationist philosophy into a theory of tropes, rather than a theory of ideas, may be read as a devastating critique of idealist accounts of the literary imagination. Read from this viewpoint, far from becoming an analogue of divine creation, Coleridge's idea of imagination foreshadows a human frailty that not only redirects it back towards the sense-perception of associationism, but also moves it dangerously closer to Nietzsche's elitist "Will-to-power".

The problem of language becomes even more acute in Coleridge's attempts to assimilate German transcendental philosophy into his *Biographia* defence of imagination. Coleridge fashions his theory of self-consciousness which he hopes will valorise his defence of the imagination as a "transfiguring power" that reconciles the traditional dilemma of the subject/object opposition. The imagination for Coleridge functions in the same way as the transcendental mind does in Kant whereby it ultimately neutralises the corrosive power of self-consciousness by producing an absolute transcendental version of the self. It is Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) that paves the way for Coleridge's philosophical construction of the doctrine of self-consciousness with its emphasis on the "I am" and "I think" which, via transcendental contemplation, are transfigured from a "conditional finite I" into an "absolute I AM". In brief, Kant argues that the unity of subjectivity and objectivity can be recovered in the form of "fine art". The thesis is based on the identification of two concepts of constructive activity: the natural world's organic production (the objective world) and artistic production (the subjective world). Artistic production, according to Kant, is self-determining and unified, unaffected by external forces or governed by anything other than itself. Art is thus considered as pure production, without any purpose and free from the constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature. Kant, however, denies that poetic language can form the basis of absolute knowledge because the nature of the concepts it attempts to articulate are "indeterminate": in "language we have many such indirect presentations modelled

upon analogy enabling the expression in question to contain, not the proper schema for the concept, but merely a symbol of reflection"[46]. Coleridge, on the contrary, attempts to surpass Kant's work on the inaccessibility of "things-in-themselves" by turning to Kant's immediate successors who, as he believes, develop the seeds of truth which are embedded, but nowhere explicitly elaborated, in Kantian doctrine. In Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* Coleridge discovers his central principle of the self-positing activity of consciousness, and Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* provides the basis for Coleridge's postulations on the consubstantiality of mind and nature via aesthetic intuition. For Kant, Coleridge's notion of the secondary imagination would be inadmissible in its claims to encapsulate the absolute knowledge behind creation.

Under the influence of Fichte and Schelling, however, Coleridge begins to argue that the mind and nature are "different modes, or degrees in perfection, of a common substratum" (*BL*: I 130). Fichte replaces Kant's unknowable "thing-in-itself" with the self-authorising activity of the consciousness. Coleridge, however, dismisses Fichte's transcendental schema on account of a "crude egoismus, a boastful and hyperstoic hostility to NATURE, as lifeless, godless, and altogether unholy" (*BL*: I 158-9). Schelling, on the other hand, inverts Fichtean theory (which begins with the ego and then goes on to postulate the non-ego of nature) by assenting to the reality of nature as a first principle, while simultaneously taking on board a Fichtean transcendental idealism as a secondary deduction. Fichte's dynamic self-consciousness is thus elevated in Schelling to the status of a notion of the absolute as a subject/object that unites reflecting consciousness and unreflecting nature in a way that confirms the activity of the "plastic power" in both mind and nature.

Schelling's *Odyssey of Spirit* attempts a construction of the history of self-consciousness through what Leask identifies as three principle powers: "undifferentiated identity of the Absolute, separation into opposite poles in ceaseless antagonism, and reconciliation at the highest level of self-consciousness, the so called 'intellectual intuition' which...Schelling found 'objectified' in art-work"[47]. The conscious activity of the mind and the unconscious power of the Absolute as it is manifested in nature are thus recognised as bi-polar forces which are reconciled in an act of aesthetic intuition. Art's elevation as the highest form of knowledge is the subject of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). Here Schelling postulates that the artist must initially withdraw from the objectivity of nature and look inside himself. In this way the poet can recapture the creativity of nature in his own creative act so that artistic mimesis can be understood as productive rather than reproductive:

> It is the poetic gift, which in its primary potentiality constitutes the primordial intuition, and conversely, what we speak of as the poetic gift is merely productive intuition, reiterated to its higher power. It is one and the same capacity that is active in both, the only one whereby we are able to think and to couple together even what is contradictory-and its name is imagination...that which appears to us outside the sphere of consciousness, as real, and that which appears within it, as ideal, or as the world of art, are also products of one and the same activity[48].

Self-consciousness is thus identified as a subject which becomes its own object or, as Coleridge explains in chapter XII of the *Biographia*: "If then I know myself only through myself, it is contradictory to require any other predicate of self, but that of self-consciousness. Only in the self-consciousness of a spirit is there the required identity of object and of representation" (*BL*: I 276-

8). Imagination, for both Schelling and Coleridge, is an intermediate faculty where the object and the subject are dialectically synthesised in the "infinite I AM". Kant's notion that art represents an aesthetic ideal which does not actually impart knowledge, means that poetic language can only be an analogue for an absolute totality; form and matter are separate. Schelling, on the other hand, imbues art with the power of creation itself so that form and essence become co-determinants.

Under Schelling's influence the principle of artistic creation becomes for Coleridge the principle of God. Coleridge can thus proclaim that "philosophy would pass into religion, and religion becomes inclusive of philosophy. We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD" (*BL*: I 283). This transgresses the Kantian doctrine that systematic knowledge is an analogy of absolute unity which prevents philosophy from achieving an absolute self-completion. Schelling's elevation of art to an almost God-like status means that poetic language must be purged of any equivocality if it is to represent an absolute form of knowledge. As early as 1800 Coleridge had offered his own advice in a letter to Godwin "to destroy the old antithesis of *Words* and *Things*...elevating, as it were, words into Things, and living Things too" (*CL*: I 625-6). Language, as Coleridge intimates, undergoes an organic growth which mirrors and is mirrored by the productive powers of nature. In this sense Coleridge can be seen to anticipate the influence of Schelling who advocated a direct correlation in the principles of both mind and nature. In the *Biographia*, as Hamilton points out: "Coleridge's language-model confusingly tries to cater for Schelling as well as Kant. If he remained loyal to a Kantian position he would have to say that language refers to the world, but only to the world as we experience it. But sometimes he states that language shows the real identity of the principles explaining growth in nature and progress in knowledge"[49].

In order to vindicate his theory of the imagination as derived from Schelling, Coleridge appeals to his *Logosophia*. He declares in chapter XII of the *Biographia* that "In the third treatise of my *Logosophia*, announced at the end of this volume, I shall give (*Deo volente* [God willing]) the demonstrations and constructions of the dynamic philosophy scientifically arranged" (*BL*: I 263). When, in chapter XIII, Coleridge (posing as a friend) informs his reader that he will reserve his ideas on the imagination for his "announced treatises on the Logos or communicative intellect in Man and Deity", he must be intending to propose how human language might be heightened by the power of Imagination. The idea of language is therefore crucial in understanding Coleridge's definition of the primary and secondary Imagination. The failure to produce the *Logosophia* has devestating effects for Coleridge's theory of the imagination (there is already a hint of its insuperable difficulties in Coleridge's parenthetical "*Deo Volente*"). Its absence renders Coleridgean theory susceptible to his own description of the dissevered body at the beginning of chapter XII:

> The fairest part of the most beautiful body will appear deformed and monstrous, if dissevered from its place in the organic whole. Nay, on delicate subjects, where a seemingly trifling difference of more or less may constitute a difference in kind, even a faithful display of the main and supporting ideas, if yet they are separated from the forms by which they are at once clothed and modified, may perchance present a skeleton indeed; but a skeleton to alarm and deter. (*BL*: I 233)

Without the intended exposition of how language can imitate the divine, poetic language falls short of Coleridge's idealising attempts to embody the perception gained by the intuition of the

primary imagination. Without the notion that language is the human equivalent of the Logos, it is impossible for Coleridge to argue that man can, via artistic creativity, move up the "Ascent of Being" towards God. The failure to incorporate the *Logosophia* within the defence of the imagination can only highlight the fact that artistic creativity cannot recreate the divine Logos[50].

The implications for Coleridge's theory and practice of poetic language are potentially devastating: art can now create its own totalising alternative to the natural world which caters for a Fichtean solipsism that entails "an almost monkish mortification of the natural passions and desires"(*BL*: I 160). The "self-construction" of the Absolute in language may metamorphose into a chaotic and forceful slippage over which the imagination can wield no control. Words, as "the shadows of notions" (*BL*: I 243), ultimately distort divine truth. This is intimated in the letter from "a friend" which precedes Coleridge's fragmented definition of the imagination. On reading the missing chapter of the imagination, the friend describes the effect on his feelings:

> *by supposing myself to have known only our light airy modern chapels of ease, and then for the first time to have been placed, and left alone, in one of our largest Gothic cathedrals in a gusty moonlight night of autumn. "Now in glimmer, and now in gloom"; often in palpable darkness not without a chilly sensation of terror; then suddenly emerging into broad yet visionary lights with coloured shadows, of fantastic shapes yet all decked with holy insignia and mystic symbols; and ever and anon coming out full upon pictures and stonework images of great men, with whose names I was familiar, but which looked upon me with countenances and an expression, the most dissimilar to all I had been in the habit of connecting with those names. Those whom I had been taught to venerate as almost super-human in magnitude of intellect, I found perched in little fret-work niches, as grotesque dwarfs; while the grotesques, in my hitherto belief, stood guarding the high alter with all the characters of Apotheosis. In short, what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while everywhere shadows were deepened into substances. (BL: I 301)*

The moment dramatises a confrontation between self and other where the analogy of the imagination is drastically transformed from a "light airy modern chapel", into a foreboding Gothic cathedral. In spite of the "palpable darkness" which engulfs the setting, "visionary lights" emerge, peopling the cathedral with grotesque images who have usurped the seat of reason. As the imagination degenerates into riotous intermingling of saints and ogres, it transforms its shadowy terrors into substances and dissolves its pillars of reason into shadows. The friend advises a censorship of the definition of the imagination because he interprets its agency as a candle burning at both ends, where poetic enlightenment ultimately amounts to spiritual darkness.

27

Coleridge's frequent ruminations on a symbolic language which represents the internal forms of organisation behind nature, have led many commentators to accept Coleridge's poetic practice in the terms set out in his theories. M.H. Abrams, for example, discusses Coleridge's poetic strategy as a synthesis of mind and nature where "nature is made thought and thought nature both by their sustained interaction and seamless metaphorical continuity"[51]. Earl Wasserman, similarly, cites Coleridge as the reconciler of "the phenomenal world of understanding with the noumenal world of reason"[52]. However, as de Man argues, the claim for a reconciliation of self and other in Coleridge is based on the assertion of "affinity" or "sympathy", terms which only "apply to the relationships between subjects rather than to relationships between a subject and an object"[53]. De Man argues that "the dialectic between subject and object does not designate the main romantic experience, but only one passing moment in a dialectic, and a negative moment at that, since it represents a temptation that has to be overcome"[54]. According to de Man this dialectic "originates...in the assumed predominance of the symbol as the outstanding characteristic of romantic diction"[55]. The romantic symbol is understood as a "seductive" illusion because it denies the "truth" of the subject's relationship to nature and its own "destiny"[56]. That truth lies in an "authentically temporal predicament"[57] that is the domain of allegory and irony: the two faces of the same fundamental experience of time. What de Man terms "allegorical" language thus supplants symbolic language within the romantic text because it forces an identification, not between the subject and the object, but between the subject and its own temporal condition:

> Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference[58].

De Man's study on the allegorical nature of language is particularly relevant to a poet like Coleridge where poetic language, as I will argue, often substitutes for the repressed desires of a temporal self. Indeed in 'Dejection: an Ode' (1802), perhaps his last significant poem, Coleridge confesses to the poetic imagination's inability to present the organic unity of his ideals. In a particularly revealing stanza the speaker laments the interruption of uncontaminated vision by the basic urgencies of the temporal, self-gratifying nature of human existence:

> But oh! each visitation
> Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
>   My shaping spirit of Imagination.
> For not to think of what I needs must feel,
>   But to be still and patient, all I can;
> And haply by abstruse research to steal
>   From my own nature all the natural man-
>   This was my sole resource, my only plan:

> Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
> And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.   (84-93)

The lines affirm Coleridge's ceaseless failure to present his organic ideals in a completed form. Indeed the moment of interruption is so severe that Coleridge's later conception of the symbol as a part which reflects an organic totality, is disfigured here to the extent that it has become an allegorical shadow which substitutes for the speaker's subjugation to putative disease. This sense of overwhelming darkness that wholly encompasses the speaker is an intrinsic element of Coleridgean poetic practice. In the following survey I will suggest that Coleridge's later theories attempt to disguise this imaginative ambivalence. I shall read the earlier poems in the light of his imitation/copy distinction, the 1816 fragment poems in the terms of the imagination/fancy distinction, and the 'Ancient Mariner' in the terms of its own gloss. Particularly in the final case the theory can almost be regarded as a therapeutic palliative which tries to sanitise the imagination's inherent attraction to power. The imagination, which is initially embraced by Coleridge as a glorious affirmation of freedom and unity, becomes a torment which must be concealed to protect of the poet's own moral safety.

I

POEMS OF FANCY

I

It addresses itself entirely to the imaginative faculty; and although the illusion may be assisted by the effect on the senses of the complicated scenery and decorations of modern times, yet this sort of assistance is dangerous. For the principal and only genuine excitement ought to come from within,-from the moved and sympathetic imagination; whereas, where so much is addressed to the more external senses of seeing and hearing, the spiritual vision is apt to languish, and the attraction from without will withdraw the mind from the proper and only legitimate interest which is intended to spring from within. (*Lects 1808-19*: II 268-9)

In his lectures on Shakespeare of 1818-19 Coleridge offers his poetic theory that art ought to represent an imaginative transformation of reality. Because a play (or indeed a poem) ought to be addressed to the imagination, Coleridge opposes certain aspects of the theatre of his time which attempt to create an illusion of reality on the stage via various props or devices. Such an attitude towards dramatic representation encourages a passive act of perception that stimulates the senses, producing a mere transcription, or copy, of reality.

This argument of course has its origins in the controversies that dominated eighteenth century aesthetics where, as Wheeler acknowledges, "artifice was set up against inspiration, conscious against unconscious, and the mechanical against the organic"[1]. The influence on Coleridge's own philosophical development is evident in his revision of the old maxim that poetry is merely a copy of nature. The imagination, as he perceives it, both transforms and essentialises objects with the effect that the senses are spiritualised. In this respect Coleridge proposes a new distinction in terminology, namely the distinction between an "imitation" and a "copy". An imitation, as he defines it, is the genuine product of imagination which uncovers the internal principles of creation. Here the image works in service of the idea. A copy, on the other hand, is merely a reflection of external objects. The image is now taken as self-essential and can lead to a degeneration of art in its emphasis on sense-impression. It is the task of the imagination to reconcile the dichotomy between the senses and the mind. Wheeler sees this as being triumphantly realised in the *Biographia* definition of the imagination: "imagination is a 'self-circling energy' capable of converting elements of a 'series into a whole'; it encircles the senses in the reason and vice versa, and transforms reason's series into a sensuous whole"[2]. However, division is embedded within Coleridge's very own definitions as a prerequisite to the proper functioning of the imaginative

faculty. These distinctions, as I have already suggested in the introduction, attempt to mask a doubleness naturally intrinsic to the poetic imagination in practice. This is made evident in the early poems which, propounding the theory of the "one life" as their theme, actually cater for the repressed agency of what would later be termed a copy or the fancy. Once again, Coleridge's theory seems to be a denial of aspects of his poetic practice.

The theory behind the notion of imitation proposes a rejection of the standpoint of associationism which believed that the higher arts had their origins in the senses. Instead of merely perceiving a landscape via the senses, and then copying the empirical data before his eyes, the poet must record his response or emotion towards that landscape thereby discovering the creative principles of organisation behind natural beauties. The earliest formation occurs in the Notebook entries of October-December 1804:

> Hard to express that sense of the analogy of likeness of a Thing which enables a Symbol to represent it, so that we think of the Thing itself-& yet knowing that the Thing is not presented to us.- Surely, on this universal fact of words & images depends by more or less mediations the *imitation* instead of *copy* which is illustrated in very nature *shakespearianized*-that Proteus Essence that could assume the very form, but yet known & felt not to be the Thing by that difference of the Substance which made every atom of the Form another thing-that likeness not identity-an exact web, every line of direction miraculously the same, but the one worsted, the other silk. (*CN:* II 2274)

That Coleridge's emotions or feelings were informed by his own senses, however, is made explicit in his own practical examination of the self during the period of his love for Sara Hutchinson and this may provide a useful insight into Coleridge's practice in the early poems. D.S Miall's survey of the nature of feelings in respect to this area of Coleridge's experience, reveals first, how bodily processes participate in the processes of the mind, and secondly, how their repression leads to an intense, unhealthy solipsism:

> This was the domain in which Coleridge mainly explored (at great cost to himself) extreme states of feeling. It came to seem that not only the definition of the self, but its very survival, depended on understanding the nature of the feelings that beset him. But it is here that the unconscious component of feelings, their many hidden connections with thought and bodily processes, their indeterminacy, place an insuperable barrier in the way of full understanding[3].

In the notes of 1810, Coleridge speculates how the self is vulnerable to powerful feelings that seem to link all thoughts:

> My love of [Asra] is not so much in my Soul, as my Soul in it. It is my whole Being wrapt up into one Desire, all the Hopes & Fears, Joys & Sorrows, all the Powers, Vigor & Faculties of my Spirit abridged into <one> perpetual Inclination. To bid me not love you were to bid me annihilate myself-for to love you is all I know of my Life, as far as my Life is an object of my Consciousness or my free Will. (*CN:* III 3996)

31

Here Coleridge relates his love in the terms of his entire mental constitution: it is the "Spirit" that leads the "Inclination" towards the act of love and the "annihilation" of the self is conceived mentally as the destruction of his own "Consciousness". In another note Coleridge, however, emphasises that the communication of love is expressed powerfully through physical contact: "all that is characteristic of his Nature as Man, is seated in the incommunicable part of his Being, of which we know that it is not his Body, nor of it; tho' it may well be, that his body is *of* it" (*CN*: III 3962). The body here is recognised as a form of communication through which he can consummate his love for Sara and yet, in the face of unfulfilment, the body becomes the utmost symbol of failed communication. The "perpetual inclination" of the first note is thus linked to an unremitting physical desire and its repression, as Miall notes, "of the self in love turns love into a kind of prison, in which the self is threatened by auto-destruction"[4]

> myself is therefore only not a feeling for reckless Despair, because she is its object / Self in me derives its sense of Being from having this one absolute Object, including all others that but for it would be thoughts, notions, irrelevant fancies-yea, my own Self would be-utterly deprived of all connection with her-only more than a thought, because it would be a Burthen-a haunting of the daemon, Suicide. (*CN* II 3148)

The self of this note is a physical one who, without the object of his love, would become mentally imprisoned by the "hauntings" of unconsummated sexuality. Self-annihilation is now only recognisable in the act of physical destruction. This disturbing pathological intention effectively emphasises the inherent dangers of repressed bodily feeling which can overwhelm and torture the psyche.

Coleridge's early poetry reveals similar tensions and anxieties which manifests itself as a dialectic within the texts between the desire to arrive at universal truths, together with an intimate and subtextual psychological detail that renders these truths open to alternative interpretations. In attempting to expound a universal philosophy of the internal principles of nature, the poems actually uncover a subtext of repressed sensuality so that they withdraw into psychological self-examinations. In 'Frost at Midnight' the lonely speaker is left to contemplate the "Abstruser musings" of his mind; 'The Dungeon' examines the "friendless solitude" of self-contemplation; and 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison', as I will argue, excludes the poet from a sympathetic appreciation of nature. In these poems, Coleridge's idealisation of imaginative vision cannot mask the fact that it is primarily something that is happening to others, to Hartley in 'Frost at Midnight', or Lamb in 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' (where Coleridge's recollection is made within the solitude of a bower, preventing him from sharing the experience of his companions). Narrative is, therefore, often an escape from the torments of the self rather than the self-effacing communion with another. The sense of personal exclusion from his theories of the "one life" is eventually confronted in the threnodic lines of 'Dejection: an Ode', where the speaker can only desparately confess his subjugation to the "tyranny of the senses":

I see them all so excellently fair,

I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!   (37-8)

Although the copy/imitation distinction has yet to be formulated, I believe that a reading of the poems in the terms of this distinction is instructive in revealing the manner in which the texts subvert their idealistic intentions and suggest how far Coleridge's later theory is a denial of some of the implications of his practice. Indeed, within the texts, what may be termed the faculties of fancy and imagination are evoked on equal terms or as working in tandem. The distinctions only come later and perhaps can be understood as an attempt to conceal a doubleness already intrinsic to the imagination.

II

Around the time of the early poetry Coleridge was expounding a theory of imagination as proposed by the philosophies of Hartley. In 1795 Coleridge was far from finding the idea of a mental mechanism repugnant, since it was precisely the element of determinism in Hartley's explanation that seemed to give an attractive final validity to the psychological proof of Christianity from human nature. In the *Lectures on Revealed Religion* (1795) Coleridge adopts a necessitarian line of argument in which the individual may be regarded as a sort of refinery in which the highest spirituality is being mechanically distilled out of sense. To use an example, physical pain, as Coleridge suggests, thus activates the innate ideas, or imagination to perform a progressive, moral function:

> The Teeth sometimes ake, but surely that we may eat not that they may ache is the great and evidently designed end of Teeth. This aching does it not proceed from uncleanliness or scorbutic Diseases? Are not these immediately or remotely the Effect of Moral Evil? But the greatest possible Evil is Moral Evil. Those Pains therefore that rouse us to the removal of it become Good. So we shall find through all Nature that Pain is intended as a stimulus to Man in order that he may remove moral Evil. (*Lects* 1795: 106)

Here the self-conscious will is subjected to the mechanical framework of a universe governed by "design": "Is the *Pain* the *designed* or the accidental Effect of our organisation?" (*Lects* 1795: 106) The danger of such an argument is that the relegation of evil to the margins and the subtexts only serves to resurrect it, often most violently, elsewhere. Lockridge correctly points out that "Ironically, Hartley's optimistic psychology derives from Locke's chapter, "Of the Association of Ideas", in the fourth edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which association is the unnatural, idiosyncratic connection of ideas occasioned by "chance or custom", often manifested in unreasonable (we might say neurotic) antipathies dating from accidental associations in our youth"[5]. Such repressions have serious consequences for Coleridge's system of natural language which struggles to unify this sort of fragmentation.

This becomes evident in the major philosophical poem 'Religious Musings' (1794-6) where Coleridge attempts to conjoin a theoretical notion of the imagination with a vision of millenial ephiphany. Coleridge's millennium philosophy was acquired via a number of sources (Hartley, Priestley, Newton), but the prose tracts of Milton also appear to be a dominant influence on the young poet, and he filled the Gutch memorandum notebook with references to the likes of *Areopagitica, Of Reformation, Animadversions,* and *The History of Britain.* Coleridge, perhaps, envisaged the philosophy of the millennium as being compatible with his ideal of Pantisocracy, writing to Southey in August 1795 that the scheme of the latter might be realised in "a miraculous Millennium" (*CL:* I 158). It is also valuable to make a distinction, as Kitson does, between the major area of dispute among millennium theologians which centred around whether the second coming of Christ would precede or follow the event of the millennium:

> Those who believed it would precede the millennium, I shall designate "millenarians", those expecting the sudden, violent establishment of the millennium by divine cataclysmic action. Those who believed that the second coming would follow the millennium, I shall designate "millennialists", those expecting the millennium to be realised gradually and, perhaps, internally by the progressive application of Christian values[6].

Coleridge in 'Religious Musings' is clearly a 'millenarian', assimilating the French Revolution with the apocalypse, and expecting the millennium to be realised in its aftermath. Like his epic predecessor Milton during the Puritan insurrection, Coleridge believed he was at the point in history where a millennium appeared imminent. The standpoint is informative in relation to Coleridge's poetic practice: the millennium aspect within the poem is considered in the terms of the violent, self-consuming imagery of apocalypse which is a necessary prerequisite to the emancipation of the nations. However, as Coleridge's confidence in the latter process waned, so did the millenarian element, until the apocalyptic alone remained. Without their fulfilling millennial antithesis, apocalyptic discourse and imagery threaten to become grotesque. This process of bedevilment is a strong characteristic of the poem: the narrative of 'Religious Musings' barely manages to contain the apocalyptic visions before the end of the poem.

In 'Religious Musings' the poet undertakes the burdensome task of incorporating the entire span of world events within his millennial vision. In this sense the poem is a Unitarian version of *Paradise Lost.* The aim of Milton's epic was to "justify the ways of God to men" by explaining the origin of evil and demonstrating its eventual sublimation in a greater good. Coleridge too in his poem assays to justify the presence of evil by regarding it as an opposition which must be overcome in order to herald the arrival of the millennium. The agency via which Coleridge hopes to dismantle the presence of evil and bring his poem to a millenarian conclusion is the imagination. In this respect he was influenced by Hartley who proposed that evil was intrinsically man-made. Hartley's philosophy propounded that there was no evidence in the design of the universe of the existence of evil, rather it was embedded in sensuous requirements of man. However, via the arts, man can elevate himself away from the false perceptions of a sensate consciousness towards an understanding of the unity of the creation. This is made explicitly clear in lines 201-12:

But soon Imagination conjured up
An host of new desires: with busy aim,
Each for himself, Earth's eager children toiled.
So Property began, twy-streaming fount,
Whence Vice and Virtue flow, honey and gall.
Hence the soft couch, and many-coloured robe,
The timbrel, and arched dome and costly feast,
With all the inventive arts, that nursed the soul
To forms of beauty, and by sensual wants
Unsensualised the mind, which in the means
Learnt to forget the grossness of the end,
Best pleasured with its own activity.

Evil is envisaged as a necessary means to a worthwhile end because it eventually gives way to a superior knowledge. But according to the tenets of associationism, the imagination cannot transcend the senses in any ultimate way because its agency is derived from a continual refining of the senses (a theory Coleridge would later reject). In its usage here imagination is thus coterminous with the later definition of the fancy. Coleridge's solution to the problem of evil is, as a result, problematic because, although evil is presented as an entity which can be overcome, it still remains an opposition which appears to be embedded within the very faculty of imagination itself.

The passage has its counter-part in 'The Destiny of Nations' where what is termed as the imagination in 'Religious Musings', is now referred to as the fancy (the terms appear to be synonymous at the time):

He marks the streamy banners of the North,
Thinking himself those happy spirits shall join
Who there in floating robes of rosy light
Dance sportively. For Fancy is the power
That first unsensualises the dark mind,
Giving it new delights; and bids it swell
With wild activity; and peopling air,
By obscure fears of Beings invisible,
Emancipates it from the grosser thrall
Of the present impulse,   (77-86)

McGann argues that "the 'Wild phantasies' of Greenland's epic lore are full of deep import. Not only is such primitive lore symbolic; it illustrates the developing historical operation of the One Life"[7]. But the lines, on the contrary, aptly disclose the ambivalent nature of the imagination. The "unsensualising" of the mind is almost immediately countered by the provocation of a "wild activity" which, as lines 38-40 inform us, opposes the creative process of God whose "naked mass" "Acts only by its inactivity".

The relationship between the apocalypse and the millennium via the agency of the imagination

thus proves to be a tense and hostile one, with the evil elements always threatening to overrun the ideological structure of the poem. This is reflected in the language of 'Religious Musings' which often appears forced, stilled and repetitive when describing the nature of the "one omnipresent Mind,/Omnific" (105-6), and yet releases a more spontaneous energy in the images of destruction and carnage which accompany the apocalyptic visions. An example occurs in lines 94-126 where the speaker begins by identifying a shepherd who, through a process of associationist principles, is transformed into a "young angel":

> As when a shepherd on a vernal morn
> Through some thick fog creeps timorous with slow foot,
> Darkling he fixes on the immediate road
> His downward eye: all else of fairest kind
> Hid or deformed. But lo! the bursting Sun!
>
> ...
> He from his small particular orbit flies
> With blest outstarting! From himself he flies,
> Stands in the sun, and with no partial gaze
> Views all creation; and he loves it all,
> And blesses it, and calls it very good!   (94-113)

Self-interested or sensuous perception is transmuted into an ability to perceive the unity of God's creative process so that the individual partakes of the essence of the "one omnipresent Mind" (105). And yet the rhythm of the verse refuses to corroborate this process: the language is repetitive and laboured, and meaning is obscured by clumsy construction. However, when this vision suddenly dissolves into the chaos of postlapsarian destruction, the stilted diction gives way to a linguistic involvement with power, enforced by expressive alliterations and energetic rhythm: "and, behold!/A sea of blood bestrewed with wrecks, where mad/Embattling Interests on each other rush/With unhelmed rage!" (123-6). The passage enacts a mini fall as language seductively involves the speaker in a libidinous and impassioned release. The imagination's complicity in such a process recalls Burke's anti-idealistic notion of the sublime as an irrational, passionate entity, devoid of the purpose of truth.

Coleridge's divine speculations accordingly emit a sense of personal exclusion: he finds it easier to believe that such harmony exists than to feel himself part of it. In lines 126-8 the speaker declares: "Tis the sublime of man,/Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves/Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole". And in case anybody gets it wrong he adds: "But 'tis God/Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole" (130-1). This strenuous willing to propose a divine philosophy which unifies the self with the creator is undercut almost immediately when the speaker digresses onto the subject of superstition. Coleridge's notion of a "natural language" is ironically fulfilled only in passages associated with violence and power: poetic diction suddenly picks up, becoming wholly intimate with its subject-matter:

36

I will raise up a mourning, O ye Fiends!
And curse your spells, that film the eye of Faith,
Hiding the present God; whose presence lost,
The moral world's cohesion, we become
An Anarchy of Spirits! Toy bewitched,
Made blind by lusts, disherited of soul,
No common centre Man, no common sire
Knoweth.   (142-9)

Language here is substituting true imagination for a debased, self-interested version which subversively asserts a corrupting passion in the guise of a religious fervour. The passage thus becomes an affirmation of the very vices it outwardly contests, and this is emphasised in the following lines:

A sordid solitary thing,
Mid countless brethren with a lonely heart
Through courts and cities the smooth savage roams
Feeling himself, his own low self the whole;
When he by sacred sympathy might make
The whole one Self! Self, that no alien knows!   (149-54)

The "sordid solitary" and "smooth savage" are elevated to an aesthetic eminence in the aggrandising alliteration, influencing the authorial voice to follow suit "sacred sympathy" and thereby weakening its impact-"might make". The "whole one self" is therefore irrevocably damaged and the ambiguity is heightened by its emphatic prominence at the beginning of each sentence as if it were indulging in a megalomanic assertion: "Self, far diffused as Fancy's wing can travel!/Self, spreading still!" (155-6).

'Religious Musings' fails adequately to control the eschatological element of a Christian millennium within its relative schema. The intrinsic doubleness of the imagination, whereby it can so effectively cater for the cataclysmic turmoil of the apocalypse, confirms its dubious attraction to images of power and destruction. Such ambivalence diminishes the possibility of a millennial golden age because the threat of reinfection is always imminent. As the speaker embarks upon the visions of the apocalypse he fears for the narrative collapse into the mire of unstable and oppressive images: "and pale Fear/Haunted by ghastlier shapings than surround/Moon-blasted Madness when he yells at midnight!/Return pure Faith! return meek Piety!" (336-9). The interjections suggest a sense of participation in the unnatural occurrences. But when the speaker comes to describe the glory of the millennium, he can only offer a tenuous vision of the future that serves to emphasise his non-participance in the present: "And such delights, such strange beatitudes/Seize on my young anticipating heart/When that blest future rushes on my view!" (355-7).

If 'Religious Musings' gives the reader a hint of the profound torture that characterises the imagination of the later supernatural poems, the effusions can be related to the workings of fancy in its sexual and mischievous sense. In these poems Coleridge's ruminations on the "one life" are often undermined by an errant playfulness. As a result the speaker of these poems can rarely respond to the inner spirit of nature and they often emit a sense of personal exclusion. Accordingly, as Conrad emphasises:

> Coleridge describes nature with a detail and subtlety missing in Wordsworth-the tangled underwood in 'The Nightingale', the weeds and matted thorns in 'The Picture', the four seasons in 'Frost at Midnight'-but he does so because he can only see, not feel it. In 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', entrapped within his frail self, he does not even see the landscape which his friends traverse, but must imagine it. 'My eyes make pictures, when they are shut', as he puts it in 'A Day Dream', and those pictures, for all their topographical acuteness, are of the mind's contents[8].

In this way the poems might be said to threaten to become copies, rather than imitations of nature, allowing the fancy the "fixities and definites" with which it can sport. The dangers of such a perceptive process are made self evident in an article that appears in the *Friend* (1809-10) some years later, where the speaker attempts to explain the phenomenon of Luther's devilish apparition:

> At the coming on of Evening, it was my frequent amusement to watch the image or reflection of the Fire, that seemed burning in the bushes or between the trees in different parts of the Garden or the Fields beyond it, according as there was more or less Light; and which still arranged itself among the real objects of Vision, with a distance and magnitude proportioned to its greater or less faintness. For still as the darkness encreased, the Image of the Fire lessened and grew nearer and more distinct; till the twilight had deepened into perfect night, when all outward objects being excluded, the window became a perfect Looking-glass: save only that my Books on the side shelves of the Room were lettered, as it were, on their Backs with Stars, more or fewer as the sky was more or less clouded (the rays of the stars being at that time the only ones transmitted). Now substitute the Phantom from the brain for the Images of *reflected* light (the Fire for instance) and the Forms of the room and its furniture for the *transmitted* rays, and you have a fair resemblance of an Apparition, and a just conception of the manner in which it is seen together with real objects. (*Friend:* II 1)

Beer emphasises the potential degeneracy behind such an act: "The superimposition of the interior scenery upon the garden beyond is no longer seen as a possible image for the mind's relationship to outward nature but is offered simply as a phenomenon of illusion to explain how Luther might have come to believe he saw the Devil when he was only looking at the opposite walls. An imagery of possible mental sublimity, in other words, is being deployed simply to explain delusion"[9]. Indeed Coleridge's rational explanation reveals a tendency that is unleashed in his own poetic process: as the window becomes a "perfect Looking Glass", it de-animates its surroundings, superimposing upon the lifeless images, further images and objects, so that they become hauntingly illusory. The copying of nature thus encourages the fanciful element of the

imagination to usurp its sympathetic counterpart.

This is made evident in the two poems 'Lines on an Autumnal Evening' (1793), and 'The Eolian Harp' (1795). Both poems are linked by their inclusion in the volume *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796). In the latter poem the area of particular interest is the lines 26-33 which first appear in the errata of the *Sibylline Leaves* (1817):

> O! the one Life within us and abroad,
> Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
> A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
> Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where-

These lines are usually interpreted as the major philosophical statement of the poem which attests to a consubstantiality of the mind and nature. However, their omission in the previous versions of the text is informative in comparison to a poem like 'Lines on an Autumnal Evening' where there is an evident similarity in the nature of poetic language. To offer a reading of 'The Eolian Harp' in the terms of its additional pronouncement would obscure the process of a sensuous interpretation of nature which is the evident characteristic of both texts.

'Lines on an Autumnal Evening' (Effusion xxxvi in the 1796 edition) begins with an exhortation for "wild Fancy" to "check thy wing", but no sooner has the speaker uttered his wish, he invokes the help of a sorceress to complete his poem: "Aid, Lovely Sorceress! aid thy Poet's dream!/With faery wand O bid the Maid arise,/Chaste Joyance dancing in her bright-blue eyes;" (14-16) and the poem immediately becomes a whim of the Fancy whose influence the poet tried to halt from the beginning. The speaker is subsequently seduced by this poetic Muse who, stripping him of "Learning's meed", encourages a heretical, sensuous approach to poetic practice:

> As erst when from the Muses' calm abode
> I came, with Learning's meed not unbestowed;
> When as she twin'd a laurel round my brow,
> And met my kiss, and half return'd my vow,
> O'er all my frame shot rapid my thrill'd heart,
> And every nerve confess'd the electric dart.   (17-22)

The thrill of an erotic titillation with which the stanza breaks off, contents the speaker to adopt a passive contemplation of the nature presented before him. The images of the poem therefore, have no further significance beyond the satisfaction of desire: the flowers blush "like a bride" (11); the lambent radiance of light assumes a salacious energy, throbbing with "rich amber-glowing floods" (4). When the speaker orders the "Spirits of Love" (37) to "Obey/The powerful spell" (37-8) of the poem's witchery, the image of the Maid becomes an end in itself, catering for the poet's sexual requirements. Her bosom heaves with the anticipation of carnal fulfilment (representing, by implication, the speaker's similar demands); and the spirits duly oblige in seducing the Maid with passionate gestures: "Love lights her smile-in Joy's red nectar dips/The flamy rose, and plants it on

her lips" (51-2). The sensual paradise ignites the speaker with a self-related desire so that he "stills" the voice of moral admonition, in order to prolong the seductive notes of that "passion warbled song" (53).

Nature now is presented in terms that reflect the desires of the self as the speaker, invoking the metamorphic power of Proteus, transforms himself into images of natural beauty:

> A flower-entangled Arbour I would seem
> To shield my Love from Noontide's sultry beam:
> Or bloom a Myrtle, from whose od'rous boughs
> My love might weave gay garlands for her brows.
> When Twilight stole across the fading vale,
> To fan my Love I'd be the Evening Gale;
> Mourn in the soft folds of her swelling vest,
> And flutter my faint pinions on her breast!
> On Seraph wing I'd float a Dream by night,
> To soothe my Love with shadows of delight:-
> Or soar aloft to be the Spangled Skies,
> And gaze upon her with a thousand eyes!   (59-70)

The seemingly unselfish guises belie a self-interested design of voyeurism. This is manifested explicitly in the final line where the senses are multiplied in order to heighten their intoxification. Coleridge, later embarrassed by the nature of these lines, adds a lengthy footnote in which he endeavours, to an excessive extent, to discredit his own composition:

> I entreat the Public's pardon for having carelessly suffered to be printed such intolerable stuff as this and the thirteen following lines. They have not the merit even of originality: as every thought is to be found in the Greek Epigrams. The lines in this poem from the 27th to the 36th, I have been told are a palpable imitation of the passage from the 355th to the 370th line of the Pleasures of Memory Part 3.

The apologetic words, which even include a charge of unconscious plagiarism, smack of the alibis and excuses that accompany the prefaces and glosses of later poetry and may be understood as an attempt to disburden himself of his heretical muse.

The text too continually plays down the witchery it has encouraged: the haunts which have provoked such sensual indulgence are described as places "where Virtue still is gay;/Where Friendship's fix'd star sheds a mellow'd ray" (87-8); Memory's ceaseless glutting on "the lambent flame of joy!" (94) is euphemistically underscored as a "Vestal's chaste employ" (93). But nature's enslavement to fancy in the performative or playful sense manifests itself when the scenes melt like ghostly apparitions:

> No more your sky-larks melting from the sight

Shall thrill the attuned heart-string with delight-
No more shall deck your pensive Pleasures sweet
With wreaths of sober hue my evening seat.
Yet dear to Fancy's eye your varied scene
Of wood, hill, dale, and sparkling brook between!   (93-98)

Of course "Fancy" here does not yet have the perjorative sense of Coleridge's later theory, yet such a sense would not be inapt. When the imagined landscapes disappear so that the poet cannot see them any more, he laments in a desperate final stanza as his senses ache for further involvement: "Scenes of my Hope! The aching eye ye leave/ Like yon bright hues that paint the clouds of eve!" (101-2). Bereft of his phantom-like visions, the poem finally descends into remorseless darkness, attesting to the fact that the scenes, in the terms of Coleridge's later distinctions, were a form of a degenerate copy.

The imagery of 'Lines of an Autumnal Evening' reappears strongly in the 'Eolian Harp' (Effusion xxxv in the 1796 edition) and again the language of the poem draws attention to its own status as an artificial construct. This becomes evident immediately in lines 1-5:

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o'ergrown
With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love !)

The symbolic significance of the natural objects Jasmin and Myrtle is undercut by the inclusion of the parenthesis which has the effect of excluding the moral qualities they impart by bracketing them from the main body of the text. The impact of the Jasmin and the Myrtle, which would unite reason and experience and thus vouch for a consubstantiality of mind and nature, is diminished because it is now realised as a linguistic "emblem" or trope. This only reinforces the view that the displacement of a symbolic language occurs at the precise moments where the unity of part and whole are most needed. The following emblem of the evening star - "and mark the star of eve/Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)/Shine opposite!" (7-9) similarly conspires to transform the natural landscape into an artifical literary trope. Commonly associated with erotic and generative love, the evening star functions as an emblem of wisdom only by a parenthetical denial of the erotic and an affirmation of purity and innocence[10].

The repression of sensual love within the parenthesis ultimately only serves to displace it explicitly to the following stanza. The lute's corruption from natural object into aesthetic instrument imbues it with an erotic power which caresses the ear, as a lover seduces his sweetheart:

How by the desultory breeze caress'd,
Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs

Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untam'd wing!   (14-25)

The passage performs a mimesis of the sexual act, prolonging its "long sequacious notes" with erotic adjectives which counterpoise their natural objects: the "surges" of sound "sink and rise" deliciously; the "honey dropping flowers" become "footless and wild"; and the birds of paradise are "untam'd" and irreverent with a restlessness akin to the agency of the fancy. The later insertion of the one life theory thus appears hopelessly out of place, and its inclusion ironically conspires with the erotic nature of the verse that precedes it: the interjection "O!", in its sequestered position at the beginning of the line, provides the text with a seminal release from the delicious rhythm of language.

The theme of 'The Eolian Harp' is often interpreted as Coleridge's vision of 'all of animated nature' as "organic Harps" played upon by "one intellectual breeze,/At once the Soul of each, and God of all" (47-8). But the story of the poem can alternatively be read as a dramatic confession of a man who allows himself to indulge in "idle flitting phantasies", "shapings of the unregenerate mind" amounting to heresy. Like 'Lines on an Autumnal Evening', the invoked "witchery" produces a copy rather than an imitation of nature. The use of Sara as an ideological reminder who reproaches the poet for his "indolent and passive brain" (41) (a charge that confirms the agency of fancy within the poem), further emphasises the instability of the speaker's "one life" vision. Sara's role as spiritual guide, "Meek Daughter in the family of Christ" (53), merely substitutes her sensual appeal (which inspires the erotic context of the poem), for an austere Christian abstinence. The conjunction is uneasy and inappropriate, wholly diminishing the humble conclusion:

For never guiltless may I speak of him,
The Incomprehensible! save when with awe
I praise him, and with Faith that inly *feels*;
Who with his saving mercies healed me,
A sinful and most miserable man,
Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!   (58-64)

The "Faith that inly *feels*" (analagous to what will later be termed an imitation) has already been undermined by the dominance of external sense perception (a copy), relating the poet to the atheist of the footnote, whom Coleridge charitably empathises with, and yet simultaneously distances himself from:

The poem, of course indulges in a similar casuistry, allowing the speaker to ease the threat of his idle fantasies with an image of spiritual reproof (Sara) that has inspired the "witchery" in the first place. But even this tenuous conciliation is damaged by the seductive nature of the text: Sara's "serious eye" only offers a "mild" (49), half-hearted reproach, further incensing the speaker with playful denial: "nor such thoughts/Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,/And biddest me walk humbly with my God" (50-2). Coleridge is using "Sara" as a scapegoat for the inherent figurality of his vision, assimilating her with the seditious Eve. Such indecisiveness at once ensures the moral corruption of speaker, Sara, and poem.

IV

The sensuous rendition of nature encourages a solipsism that manifests itself more fully in the so called conversation poems. 'Lines on an Autumnal Evening' concludes with the speaker's fall into a lonely darkness, and the "shapings of the unregenerate mind" in 'The Eolian Harp' confirm the speaker as the "sinful and most miserable man,/Wilder'd and dark" that he attempts to distance himself from. Within poems such as 'Frost at Midnight' 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison', and 'The Nightingale', conversation is actually replaced by monologue encouraging a confrontation with the speaker's own psyche. The texts accordingly finally offer no realised communion with another, and the process of their potentially megalomanic narratives, as I hope to demonstrate, is at odds with the idealistic readings that have characterised critics responses to them. From start to finish the conversation poem is an allegorical disruption of the pursuit of knowledge trapped within the *cogito*; the desired reciprocity of man and nature, self and other, turns out to be a chimera, an escape that confirms the fact of its own imprisonment.

Traditional readings of 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison'(1797), emphasise how the speaker's dejection becomes a catalyst for creativity so that the bower, transformed by the power of imagination, is no longer a prison but the catalyst for an intimate relationship with God's nature beyond its confines. This view is fortified by a deliberate rhetorical construction within the poem which attempts to establish a reader/author relationship whereby conversation is used as a means to project beyond the boundaries of the poem by asking the reader to enact imagination in experience and so, through sympathy with the narrator, release him from the bower which entraps him. Within the poem itself this model of reading is repeated through the relationship between Coleridge and Lamb, the former acting as the sympathetic interpreter of the latter. The very act of communion, or shared experience, is therefore essential in the rhetorical construction of the poem if it is to succeed in reversing the parodox that the title of the poem suggests. However, as I intend to argue, this complex construction of vision is undermined by the lack of any real communion between

43

Coleridge and Lamb within the material essence of the text. When Lamb is addressed within the poem (twice in line 28 and 68), it is via grandiose rhetorical apostrophe as if the speaker has forgotten the subject of his poem and is re-introducing Lamb to his equally forgotten audience. Without Lamb's presence within the main body of the text to act as the agent of nature's divine presence, the act of communion and sharing of imaginative experience is destroyed. As a result, an alternative and powerful reading of the poem emerges from the margins which figuratively re-orders God's landscape in accordance with the speaker's own solitary mind.

The pictoral accuracy of language and the topographical exactness of natural description corroborates with such a reading because it brings attention to the fact that the external element of nature is being evoked rather than its inherent spirituality. Stillinger points out that: "One could easily draw (or mentally re-create) a picture of Coleridge's dell, giving a proper angle to the sides, adding the branchless ash tree in front of the waterfall, and sketching in the trembling leaves, the long lank weeds, and the blue clay stone. Coleridge's syntax is a little awkward, but the images are concrete, highly detailed, and presented in clear relationships to one another"[11]. However, Stillinger misses the point when he continues to draw an analogy between this precise landscape with the "ubiquity of beauty and God's presence in nature"[12]. It is precisely the exactness of description and accuracy of detail that ultimately confirms the poem to be a "copy" of nature, which constructs its vision through trope and metaphor. The language of the poem can thus be seen to reflect the design of its construction whereby the act of conversation is reliant upon an artificial relationship between author and reader. In both cases the contrivance is susceptible to a breakdown where the speaker is left alone to confront his own solipsism.

A sense of isolation manifests itself immediately in the opening line of the poem where the announcement of the departure of others is balanced with the introduction of the solitary I, creating an almost insuperable barrier: "WELL, they are gone, and here must I remain". The beauties which are recorded as lost are thus refigured by the speaker's own imagination which substitutes true nature for its own subtle yet finally distorted interpretation. As Coleridge's absent friends enjoy a wholesome communion with the natural world in their own constitutional, they are led into a Spenserian wood of error in Coleridge's text: as they traverse "The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep" (10), they metaphorically enter into the dark, labyrinthine psyche of the speaker. Images of adumbration begin to manifest themselves: the dell becomes "only speckled by the mid day sun" (11); "that branchless ash" remains "Unsunn'd and damp" (13-14); and the hues of verdant scenery assume a shadowy and overgrown perspective in "the dark green file of long lank weeds" (17). The "long lank weeds" are a "most fantastic sight!" because they are the creation of the speaker's own fantasy which attest to his powers of almost God-like creation. In the post-coital aftermath of his self-contained vision, he tries to ground his imagined landscape in fact by ascribing to his vegetation an authorial classification in a footnote: "*The Asplenium Scolopendrium* called in some countries the Adder's Tongue, in others the Hart's Tongue, but Withering gives the Adder's Tongue the trivial name of the *Ophioglossum* only". However, as so often in Coleridge, the addendum, instead of verifying the speaker's claims, reveals his complicity in the act of false creation: by assimilating the weeds with Asplenium Scolopendrium through the proverbial name of Adder's Tongue he emphasises, in the words of Conrad, "their devilishness... they are nests for the serpent which always in Coleridge betokens the imagination's attraction to a forbidden knowledge)"[13].

The poem now may be read as a fantasy of the power of one's own imagination as the poet invokes "ye clouds" to "richlier burn" (35) and "thou blue Ocean" to "kindle" (37). This diminishes

the impact of the Berkeleyan reading of nature as the symbolic language of God because it implies that the imagination has the power of divine fiat. In other words, the speaker can be seen artificially to ascribe the imagined scenes to the agency of God as a sort of underwriting of the personal imagination:

> yea, gazing round
> On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
> Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
> As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
> Spirits perceive his presence.   (39-43)

The poet is sequestered from this vision and, in spite of his exhortation–"and I am glad/As I myself were there!" (44-5)-he remains imprisoned within his own uneasy consciousness that is now represented by the bower. In his total seclusion nature becomes unnaturally silent: "the bat/Wheels silent by"(56-7), and "not a swallow titters"(57). Even the bower, described in its minute detail, can almost be dismissed as an ephemeral Coleridgean fantasy: the foliage hangs 'transparent'ly (47); and a "deep radiance" (52) "usurps" (53) the substantiality of the "fronting elms" (54) with an adumbration of "blackest mass".

The poem's conclusion attempts to re-establish the conversational element by suggesting that "My gentle-hearted Charles!"'s (68) current sympathy with nature's beauties can at least induce us to contemplate "With lively joy the joys we cannot share". But even this is diminished by recourse to the earlier description of Lamb which is explicitly autobiographical, recalling a similar moment where the poet describes himself in lines 51-3 'Frost at Midnight':

> My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
> And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,
> In the great City pent, winning thy way
> With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
> And strange calamity!   (28-32)

The striking similarity between this description of Lamb and Coleridge's description of himself in his later poem intensifies the solipsistic nature of the narrative. More importantly, however, it conflates and confuses the intentional structure of the poem which assumes both a sympathetic reader or interpreter and an experiencing author. Instead of being the experiencing author of the original excursion, the figure of Lamb can equally be interpreted as a Coleridgean doppleganger who has been wholly appropriated by the mischievous author of the imagined excursion. By blurring the author/reader relationship within the text, the poem thus generates an alternative reading where conversation is displaced by the brooding malaise of monologue.

It has been widely acknowledged by critics that a sympathy with the laws of nature in the conversation poems is always achieved vicariously via an act of bestowal. Such an act in itself attests to a sense of personal isolation or a displacement of feeling, and yet it has often been

45

interpreted as an unselfish gesture through which the speaker can escape from his past and undergo a kind of restorative process[14]. But Coleridge's invoked personae always seem to reflect himself, making the release from the self an almost insuperable task. In 'Frost at Midnight' (1798), Coleridge uses his infant son as a surrogate through whom he may comprehend a sympathetic union with nature. The poem thus embarks upon a sort of rite of passage, developing from the self-conscious contemplation of the speaker through to the self-effacing sympathy towards nature enjoyed by the young Hartley. Rajan sees this as being realised in the image of the frost, which: "marks the last verse paragraph as an answer to the first. At the beginning the poet is cut off from his world by the coldness of the season and fluctuates restlessly between "Abstruser musings" and unfulfilled daydreams (l. 6, *STC*). At the end the emotional climate has changed, and the child inhabits a paradisal world in which all seasons are equally sweet"[15]. However, the image of the frost is displaced within the poem by the central image of the stranger which connects all images through its sequence of associations. The stranger, with its narcissistic connections, emblematises the working of fancy so that all images prove to be a figurative re-ordering of each other. The predominant emotion is accordingly one of stasis as the narrative appears incapable of escaping from its own self-domination.

The poem is thus explicitly self-referential and this is manifested immediately in the opening lines where the frost's silent task seems to offer no reciprocity with the natural world: "The Frost performs its secret ministry,/Unhelped by any wind". Its arcane movements, as a result, acquire a sinister and subversive form that threatens and frightens God's creatures. The owl's portentous cry sets an atmosphere of uneasy disquiet that is qualified by an immediate analogy between the frost and speaker:

> The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
> Have left me to that solitude, which suits
> Abstruser musings: save that at my side
> My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
> 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
> And vexes meditation with its strange
> And extreme silentness.   (4-10)

The silence that envelops the surrounding vicinity does not promote an opportunity for peaceful contemplation, but rather allows a dangerous potential solipsism to provoke the "Abstruser musings" of the mind. Within such self-enclosure the image of the 'cradled infant' is casually by-passed as the extremity of the silence provokes an almost trance like reverie. The lines "Sea, hill, and wood,/This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood" (10-11) unlocks the forbidden world of the speaker's dreams where the self can reign supreme and can connect all images to its own dominating consciousness. This is realised linguistically in the hypnotic repetition of the line which, in the addition of the second conjunction "and", provides a sequence of association where all images disturbingly melt into one another, and then randomly evaporate into nonentity.

The text now suddenly focuses on the image of the fluttering stranger and its self-generated activity immediately makes it analogous with both the speaker and the frost: "Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature/Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,/Making it a companionable form"

46

(17-19). As a "companiable form" which offers "dim sympathies", the stranger, we will see, may be read as a parody of the creative force behind nature, reasserting in its stead a degenerate creativity which threatens to transform the natural imagery of the poem into proxies for its own agency. The stranger, in the words of Newlyn, "both mirrors and focuses meditation, ordering the associations and allusions through which the poem moves"[16]. This is made explicit in the revision of the text which omits lines that juxtapose the seriousness and frivolity of fancy's workings, and displays a liberating potential alongside such idle association:

> But still the living spirit in our frame,
> That loves not to behold a lifeless thing,
> Transfuses into all its own delights,
> Its own volition, sometimes with deep faith
> And sometimes with fantastic playfulness[17].   (21-5)

In the revision the possibility of a "deep faith" is rejected because the stranger randomly constructs objects that have no spiritual significance, and the imagery of the poem accordingly becomes a slave to its whimsical connections: "Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit/By its own moods interprets, every where/Echo or mirror seeking of itself,/And makes a toy of Thought" (20-23).

Release from the self thus appears impossible, and as the speaker attempts to recreate the natural splendours of his "sweet birth place" (28), the vision falls victim to the image of the imprisoned stranger that precedes it. Coleridge's description assumes a dream-like fabrication which subjugates nature to the constructs of self-imposition: the bells of the church tower which ring "so sweetly" (31), haunt the speaker with "a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear/Most like articulate sounds of things to come!" (32-3). The undercurrent of a sensuous, daemonic pleasure is creative in its "articulacy", investing it with a self-assertion opposing the self-effacing silence of the divine logos. When the speaker awakes the "following morn" (36) his dream encourages an intense introspection so that the reality of the surrounding community is replaced by a series of fictional personae who attest to the stranger's powers of self-mutation:

> And so I brooded all the following morn,
> Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
> Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
> Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
> A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
> For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,
> Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
> My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!   (36-43)

The penultimate stanza's apostrophe to the sleeping babe attempts to move away from the idle recreations of the fanciful stranger, envisaging a future for the infant that is imbued with the

47

imaginative presence of nature's spectacles. However, Hartley's absorption of the "one Life" takes place in the future tense that is more obviously wishful. This can be contrasted directly to the speaker's own earlier recollection of childhood which exudes a strong sense of isolation and imprisonment. It is almost as if Coleridge is trying to create for himself a fictional, idyllic childhood through his son. In this sense the presence of Hartley within the poem is merely a refiguration of the image of the stranger as both are vicarious agents through which the speaker hopes to achieve a kinship with nature. Hartley is the natural offspring of the poet, and the stranger is his imaginative counterpart. The one is a dangerous parody of the other: just as the poem inherits its author's self-revolving nature, the mental vices of Coleridge are transposed into his own son. The subsequent imagery of the one life accordingly fails to represent the Berkeleyan description of nature as a divine and holy alphabet: the images of nature we are offered, the lakes, mountains, and clouds, are oddly static. Furthermore their reflection in the clouds produces a copy of nature which appeals to the senses: "so shalt thou see and hear/The lovely shapes" (58-9). It is the external form of nature and not its internal principles of creation that are evoked. Despite the idealistic reading, offered by Coleridge himself, that would have the poem returning to its opening but at a higher level of vision, one can equally well argue that the poem comes full circle, failing to escape the entrapment that it set out initially to overcome.

'Frost at Midnight' hints at the fact that the speaker's imprisonment may in some way be connected to the frailty of poetic language (ie. the contrast between human and divine language). There is a sense that the infant Hartley, in his state of linguistic innocence, might well feel the creative principles behind nature's external presence. The hope, however, that he will continue to do so is altogether more tenuous. The divine word or logos of God persistently resists its incorporation into the language of men which appears to mediate for the repressed desires and fears of the speaker. This is signified by the capricious stranger which, as an agent of fancy, transforms the poetic imagery within the poem according to its own volitions. Fancy is thus an intrinsic element of the poetic imagination because its deconstructive powers will always be at work within the equivocal system of language. This is made evident in the poem 'The Nightingale' (1798) which emphasises poetic language's inability to produce an imitation of nature.

When the speaker of 'The Nightingale' describes the eponymous bird as "'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!" (13), he appropriates the nightingale within an established poetic form so that it becomes a Miltonic mouth-piece reminding him of man's fall from a natural, intuitive knowledge, into a discursive, poetic knowledge. The line is accompanied with a footnote that discloses a characteristic gesture of self-qualification:

> 'Most musical, most melancholy'. This passage in Milton possesses an excellence far superior to that of mere description; it is spoken in the character of the melancholy Man, and has therefore a dramatic propriety. The Author makes this remark, to rescue himself from the charge of having alluded with levity to a line in Milton; a charge than which none could be more painful to him, except perhaps that of having ridiculed his Bible.

As Luther explains: "Like many defensive gestures, this note calls attention to that which it was apparently designed to conceal. His overly scrupulous protestation of good faith underscores that, if Milton is Coleridge's literary 'Bible', the Author's conversational alter ego actively engages in promoting heresy"[18]. This is corroborated by the retraction in the verse which immediately

attempts to redress the nightingale's poetic figuration: "A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!" (14). The line, however, has its counterpart in a deleted line of 'Frost at Midnight' which implicitly relates the bird to the allusions and associations of the fanciful stranger: "With which I can hold commune. Idle thought!" (19). The nightingale's song must now accommodate a poetic consciousness which diminishes its status within the poem as a natural sign. The speaker is of course correct when he declares that "In Nature there is nothing melancholy" (15), because it is nature's incorporation within the boundaries of poetic language which renders it susceptible to the fanciful erotic overtones of the speaker.

The "night-wandering man" who "filled all things with himself,/And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale/Of his own sorrow" (19-21) is, in this way, a natural poet as his song mediates for his own solipsistic fears and desires. Language proves inefficient in imitating the creative process of the divine logos and this becomes apparent when the speaker declares:

> and so his song
> Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
> Be loved like Nature! But 'twill not be so;
> And youths and maidens most poetical,
> Who lose the deepening twilights of the spring
> In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
> Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
> O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.   (32-9)

Poetic imagination is a fall away from primary vision because it is marred by its form of representation and can thus only offer a conditional form of knowledge (as the speaker of 'Kubla Khan' discovers).

The twenty-five lines of self-qualification (14-39) for having uttered the initial Miltonic phrase means that 'The Nightingale' is not a celebration of "different lore" (41), but a product of a "Poet who hath been building up the rhyme/When he had better far have stretched his limbs/Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell" (24-6). The bird, unable to free itself from its poetic appropriation, becomes an outlet for the speaker's subconscious to manifest itself within the narrative. Its song accordingly, acquires an inherent sensuality which breaks the stillness of the evening: its "delicious notes" (45) require a constant gratification which even the day proves incapable of sating.

When the nightingale "disburthen[s] his full soul/Of all its music" (48-9), it infects the language of the poem with the brooding repressions of a postlapsarian consciousness so that nature becomes insidiously fallen: the grove becomes wild and tangled as it bears the imprint of the speaker's own deranged pysche, and the emergence of the uninhabited gothic castle realises the manifestation of a dark, sensuous desire:

> And I know a grove
> Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,
> Which the great lord inhabits not; and so
> This grove is wild with tangling underwood,

> And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
> Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.   (49-54).

The "most gentle Maid" (69) who finds herself compulsively attracted to the seductive notes of the nightingales is presented almost as a fragile Christabel whose exposure to the powerful "sensation" of an amplified chorus of song threatens to transform her into the more experienced Geraldine. Her perception of nature is subsequently destabilised as her swimming senses interpret her surroundings with images of erotic intoxification: the nightingales now appear to "perch giddily" (83); and their "wanton song"[s] (85) are tuned to the motion of the "swinging" (84) branch so that they are articulated "Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head" (86).

The problem behind the faithful imitation of nature thus appears to be directly linked to the equivocal nature of poetic language itself. Articulation accomodates the agency of the fancy which mars an imitative approach to nature in its manifestation of subconscious repressions. The young Hartley's "imitative lisp" (93) at the conclusion of the poem is already indicative of his transmission into a world of language. His disturbing dream is evidence of his completion of the Lacanian mirror phase where identity appeared unified and stable, and his entrance into a system of difference where the repository of that which has to be repressed is manifested in the realms of the subconscious. His eyes which "glitter in the yellow moon beam" (105) may well attest to the remedial text of nature, but their configuration within the boundaries of poetic language allegorically aligns them with the solipsistic narcissism of the coruscating eyes of the Ancient Mariner.

II

THE 1816 FRAGMENT VOLUME

I

> Or substance might be called that shadow seemed
> For each seemed either!   (*P.L* I:301)

The Miltonic citation in the friend's letter in *Biographia Literaria* advising the poet not to disclose the theory of the imagination is as significant as it is revealing. Mudge argues that the invocation plays a role in legitimating "the importance of the transformative powers of the literary imagination"[1], which acts as a "fulcrum" between internal and external perception so that subject and object merge into a subliminal unity. The implications of the reference are in fact far more sinister, confirming Coleridge's fears that the creative faculty is irrevocably divided, a victim of Bloomian "anxieties of influence". Milton's epic text, with its irresistible anti-hero of Bloom's reading, has been read as informing its successors that the literary imagination is a fallen faculty which disrupts the symbolic relationship between idea and image: aesthetic value is, in this light, potentially self-serving, often drawing upon the inexhaustible energies of the morally degenerate Satan. The Coleridgean narrative of the *Biographia*, fraught with such tensions, thus implicitly relates the imagination to what Conrad describes as "a trespass upon a prohibited knowledge"[2], and "knowledge", as the motto of the prospectus of the *Watchman* informs us, "is power". The excerpt from *Paradise Lost* alludes to the arbitrary nature of imagination, interpreting its agency as a Pandemonium of impalpable and infernal dreams, and is directly behind the friend's call for the censorship of the mechanics of artistic creation.

The 'Pains of Sleep' (1803), published together with 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan' in 1816, analyses this self-destructive poetic process which amounts to a moral and spiritual denunciation. The poem's mistrust of the supposedly visionary power, together with its helpless attraction for the prohibited and fantastic images, makes it paradigmatic for the unhallowed practices of the supernatural verses. The opening stanza strives towards the moral function that Coleridge assigns to poetry in its attempt to establish a unity of self that corresponds to the unity of the poem. The speaker adopts a Christian rhetoric which he hopes will symbolise the benevolent, sympathetic faculty of imagination in its appeal to the quietism of love:

My spirit I to love compose,
In humble trust mine eye-lids close,
With reverential resignation,
No wish conceived, no thought exprest,
Only a sense of supplication.   (5-9)

The attempts, however, to conjoin poetic theory and practice are diminished by an overwhelming lack of conviction which manifests itself in the text through a forced and stilted diction. The speaker tries to achieve the feeling of love via the laborious process of "slow degrees"; this conflicts with Coleridge's theories on the subject of love which should reflect the instinctive movement of our nature. The personal failure to achieve a spontaneous response is compensated for by an affirmation of the redemptive powers of God: "A sense o'er all my soul imprest/That I am weak, yet not unblest,/Since in me, round me, every where/Eternal Strength and Wisdom are" (10-15). Yet again, however, the text illuminates a disjunction between idea and articulation in the clumsy rhyming of "where.../Are" which concludes the stanza in a dangerously dissonant manner.

The fracturing of the univocal nature of the voice thus provides an immediate outlet for a repressed Other which seismically erupts into actuality in the following stanza: "But yester-night I prayed aloud/In anguish and in agony,/Up-starting from the fiendish crowd/Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me" (14-17). This disfiguration of the theoretically sympathetic imagination into a powerful and daemonic force ironically aids and abets poetic fluidity so that artistic inspiration acquires a salacious energy which is morally destructive: "A lurid light, a trampling throng,/Sense of intolerable wrong" (18-19). The speaker, caught perilously between the imperatives of two voices, evokes the dichotomous nature of the imagination in a series of images which fuses together diametric opposites:

Thirst of revenge, the powerless will
Still baffled, and yet burning still!
Desire with loathing strangely mixed
On wild or hateful objects fixed.   (21-4)

The lines aptly enact the breakdown of the later spurious Fancy/Imagination distinction: in its "powerless" state the will, devoid of self-consciousness, assumes a Hartleian necessitarianism which relates it directly to a corruptive physiognomy ("burning"); and yet the word "baffled" suggests a self-conscious recognition of the ensuing confusion so that the speaker is simultaneously attracted and repulsed by his moral apostasy. This self-generated activity of the narrator's imagination is thus inextricably linked with an illicit form of power which assimilates artistic creation with a reduplication of original sin. This is confirmed by the speaker's reaction of "guilt, remorse or woe" (30), and when the visions have finally passed he is, like the wedding-guest, "saddened and stunned" (34), by what he has experienced.

'The Pains of Sleep' interprets the process of poetry as a continual act of seduction between other and self which involves a necessary transferral of knowledge. The speaker's redemptive tears momentarily defer this schizophrenic disorder only for the process of diabolic possession to be

repeated all over again. As he concludes in reflection that "Such punishments, I said, were due/To natures deepliest stained with sin,-" (43-4), the word "sin" brings the narrator full circle, reminding him of his fallen status. The dash, like a foreboding calm before a storm, signifies the inevitable moral collapse and the text responds violently with a seismic burst of daemonic energy which transfixes the speaker in its visionary gaze: "The unfathomable hell within,/The horror of their deeds to view,/To know and loathe, yet wish and do!" (46-8). This presence of a conflicting dialogue within the poem is the condition of romantic creation which haunts the narratives of the supernatural verses, and is precisely accountable for the way in which they subvert their own idealisms.

II

In her analysis of 'Kubla Khan', Kathleen Wheeler uses the previously quoted Miltonic lines from chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria* to emphasise the importance of metaphor within the poem:

> The implied exchange of value between shadow and substance reinforces the idea that the metaphors (shadows) implied by the images (substances) of lines 1-30, may be at least as important as the images taken literally [Wheeler understands the shadow/substance opposition within the poem as an example of the imagination's synthesis of the object/subject dilemma in practice]: stanza iii has one further significant complication, and that is the ambivalent referent of the pronoun "it" in line 35. The pronoun ought by progression and continuity to refer to the "shadow of the dome of pleasure". But the continuation into line 36 shifts the force of the referent to "A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice". The "miracle of rare device" itself floats between these two images, and the uncertainty as to which the miracle unifies the shadow with the final image in another daring stroke of identification or synthesis, which seems to confuse at the level of imagery, but which continues the game of mimesis at the level of self-referring poetic commentary. Thus the "miracles of rare device" are metaphors, symbols, and images embodying ideas, as well as whole works of art. Stanza iii has forced us to a recognition of the nature of relationship at the expense of sensible content in poetic tropes. But this is precisely the direction necessary for the gradual transition from representative language and description to symbolic and relational language expressive of ideas, especially the idea of the nature of human creativity as figuration, or the making of figures of speech[3].

The elevation of metaphorical language, which, she argues, contributes to the overall effect of unity within the poem, is directly related to her formalist interpretation of the secondary imagination: "Artistic creation is a re-creation which re-news, restores, and refreshes the familiar, the no longer strange, the merely customary, or the habitual world..."[4] Knowledge, in this sense, is explicitly metaphorical because it re-invigorates the obscured act of perception via a novel and fresh figuration of language. Wheeler, however, fails to acknowledge the fact that the figurative language employed in the definition of the secondary imagination causes a slippage which underscores the faculty's unifying powers so that it loses its consubstantiality with primary perception (see Intro. p.12). Her interpretation of the secondary imagination, therefore, in the terms of its own self-presentation allows her, confusingly, to assimilate the roles of symbol and metaphor within the

poem: " 'Kubla Khan' depicts precisely and self-consciously the necessity for the image and the senses to work in the service of the idea and the imagination, and vice versa, through the medium of metaphor and symbol"[5].

In the later *Aids to Reflection* (1825), Coleridge makes a clear differentiation between symbolic and metaphorical literary usage:

> I have only to add that these analogies are the material, or (to speak chemically) the *base*, of symbols and symbolic expressions; the nature of which is always *tautegorical* (i.e. expressing the *same* subject but with a difference) in contradistinction from metaphors and similitudes, that are always *allegorical* (i.e. expressing a *different* subject but with a resemblance) (*Aids to Reflection 1825*: 206).

The former implies mimesis, or at least synechdoche, whereas the latter implies association or theatrical performance. Such a distinction lies at the very heart of the division in interpretation of the secondary imagination; on the one hand committed to an imitation of the divine (where the image works in service of the idea); and on the other hand a potential fiction-making power (where the image is divorced from the idea and becomes the end in itself). Metaphors, as "shadows", thus imply an abstraction rather than an illumination of truth, replete with the Miltonic connotations of fraudulence and subversion in their ability to recreate. 'Kubla Khan' does not, as Wheeler suggests, progress "through differences and oppositions towards similarity, and finally oneness or unity"[6], rather it works on the level of its own metaphorical seduction so that it undermines the notion of a unified self in language.

III

The very fact that Coleridge felt that 'Kubla Khan' could not speak for itself without the addition of a prefatory explanation is already indicative of a tension between rhetoric and ideology within the poem itself which must be qualified and patched over. By virtue of its very presence, the preface embarks upon a process of impersonalisation which avoids any intimate involvement with its subject-matter by providing a critical over-view of it. This is reflected in its contents which offer a succession of alibis and excuses that amount to a contrived diminishment of poetic responsibility: Byron is blamed for the poem's publication; the nature of the verse is the result of an unconscious opium dream; and the man from Porlock is held responsible for its incompletion.

Such evasiveness invites a direct comparison with Derrida's "second signification of the 'supplement'" in *Of Grammatology*, which also offers empty compensations and substitutions:

> But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*supplant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.

54

> Somewhere, something can be filled up of *itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself[7].

The first signification of the supplement is, by comparison, far more positive: "The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, *the fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence"[8]. According to Derrida the second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first as both are linked by a condition of exteriority: "But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it"[9]. As an "exterior addition" to the text, the preface thus performs the role of a supplement where meaning is dependent upon the play of signification: "But the inflexion varies from moment to moment. Each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other"[10].

Shelley's prefaces, as E. Gold asserts, function in the manner of the first signification of the supplement, accumulating and enriching presences in the text:

> Shelley's prefaces often reflect their poems in miniature, embodying the psychological, philosophical, and imaginative struggles their speakers or protagonists undergo. Intimately connected to the verse they precede thematically, verbally, even structurally, they bring the reader to their poem's thresholds; engage the reader in their work's creative processes[11].

If we apply this commentary on Shelley to the relationship between Coleridge's preface and poem, the dangers of supplementation become apparent in a perversion of meaning where, as Derrida continues, "the sign, the image, or the representer, become forces and make 'the world move'"[12]. In a traditional, humanist reading of 'Kubla Khan' the position of the preface is generally regarded in terms of the second signification of the supplement, as "compensatory and vicarious"[13], or in the words of Ober, an empty "Coleridgean hoax, albeit a harmless one"[14]. Gold's words, applied to Coleridge, would appear remarkably out of place here. But a deconstructive reading of the poem (as I intend to argue myself) would view the spurious substitutions of the preface as an integral part of the creative processes of the poem itself, so that the emphasis of the signification shifts from the second to the first inflexion.

As a result, each of Coleridge's non-committal exemptions in the preface relate him directly to the intensely subjective desires that are released in the poem. Byron's responsibility for the poem's publication is extended throughout the preface by the use of a third person narrative which creates an effect of aesthetic distance. This is further complicated by the fact that the referent of this "Author" remains unclear. When the persona of the preface writes: "as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned", there is a certain degree of uncertainty as to who "the Author" refers to. It could be the writer of the advertisement, the writer of the verse, or even Lord Byron, the "poet of great and deserved celebrity". Such ambiguity is even further confused by a sudden shift into the first person singular in the final paragraph which suggests a possible complicity in the act of poetic creation: "As a contrast to this vision, *I* have annexed a fragment of a very different character, describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease". However, as most critics fail to note, these various subterfuges of persona are reiterated in the verse which shifts uneasily from the third

to the first person singular. In other words the preface is accumulating presences that are already evident in the text itself so that its apparent disclaimers paradoxically suggest involvement.

The story of the administering of opium at the time of the poem's composition similarly evades the vital question of poetic ownership. The speaker is keen to emphasise that 'Kubla Khan' is the product of the creative unconscious over which he has effectively no control:

> The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he had the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as *things* with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort.

The endnote of the recently discovered Crewe manuscript, on the other hand, offers a contradictory account of the composition of the poem:

> This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium taken to check a dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock & Linton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, in the fall of the year, 1797 (quoted by E.L. Griggs in *CL*: I 349).

The main point to note here is the divergence in description of the state of mind which possessed the author when he wrote the poem: a "sort of reverie" cannot be compared with "a profound sleep". The latter implies a complete disassociation between the poet's conscious thought and his vision. The former, on the other hand, implies daydreaming where some sort of conscious control is being exercised. In the light of such a semi-conscious state of poesis, 'Kubla Khan' must bear with it the undeniable imprint of Coleridge's own poetic imagination which is working (at least to some extent) independently of the influence of opium.

It is precisely at such moments of self-awareness that Coleridge discovers the imagination's effective ambivalence which prevents the convergence of poetic theory and practice: the creative faculty's attraction to power, lust and oppression in 'Kubla Khan' poses a constant threat to Coleridge's idealised notion of imagination as a sympathetic and benevolent entity, and, as a result, it must be disburdened. The fanciful elaborations of the 1816 Preface (which encourages the reader to accept an almost mythological account of the properties of opium) could even be regarded as a cunning subterfuge behind which the poet hopes anonymously to disappear.

The final excuse that the preface offers (in relation to the poem's incompletion) also involves a deferral of responsibility which ultimately relates the speaker of the preface to the speaker of the poem. Ostensibly the man from Porlock is blamed for a poem which is only a quarter of its intended conceptual length. But Coleridge also implicitly suggests that the interruption of the vision is not only responsible for its fragmentation, but also for the rupturing of the relationship between intention and meaning in the existing poem. By doing this, as Janowitz argues, Coleridge is actually invoking the fragment as "a convenient rubric" through which he can explain away a poetry that attests "to an inadequation of figuration to meaning"[15]. This is authenticated by an extract from another poem, 'The Picture', which explains the repercussions of poetic loss as a gradual misrepresentation of the original vision:

56

> Then all the charm
> Is broken-all that phantom-world so fair
> Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,
> And each mis-shape[s] the other.   (91-4)

The extract continues in the confidence that the vision will return and the sundered fragments will be unified back into an epiphanal completion: "And lo, he stays,/And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms/Come trembling back, unite, and now once more/The pool becomes a mirror" (97-100). But the extract ultimately belies the speaker's intentions in its subversive mediation for a narcissistic "other" which diminishes the professed unity of artistic perception. The youth forgets the forms of nature so that when the reflection fades he transposes his own image and thus completes his own Narcissean metamorphosis.

The problem of misrepresentation thus extends beyond a mere loss of inspiration to the more serious consequences of an intransigent disjunction between vision and articulation. The preface to 'Kubla Khan' creates an expectancy of wholeness in its allusion to visionary completion by circumnavigating the inefficacy of words: Coleridge refers to his dream as one in which "all images rose up before him as Things". Poetic language, on the other hand, cannot mirror the "Things" of the vision which promise to bring the poem into an untampered congruence. This becomes clear in the text when the speaker wishfully projects himself into the impossible, non-existent time-zone of the conditional where self-hood is effaced: "I *would* build that dome in air" (46). The "woulds" and the "shoulds" effectively amount to a deferral of poetic responsibility which evade the complications imposed by human language and its necessary representations of the self, along with its various drives and energies. With its false promises of poetic completion, poem and preface share an intimate relationship which link them to the same voice.

This relationship is made explicit in Coleridge's manipulation of the source, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, where the preface engages itself in the rhythmical turbulences that haunt the narrative of the poem. The descriptive narrative of Purchas which states passively- "In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plain ground with a wall"-is subjected to an insidious rhetoric of power which anticipates the oppressive nature of the verse: "Here the Khan Kubla *commanded* a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were *inclosed* within a wall". As Conrad explains, "The metrical impulse starts up here, only to be stifled again. When the poem itself delivers a third version of those words in its first lines, that impulse is violently freed, and in being freed it unleashes Kubla's overweening romantic imagination"[16].

For this reason 'Kubla Khan' cannot be interpreted as a regaining of paradise where oppositions are converted into a totality. Jasper declares that the poem dramatises "the theological task of the poetic imagination which is explored, as it "revives" the symphonic vision and rebuilds Kubla's dome; paradise lost and regained"[17]. Wheeler too posits that the poem concludes with the notion of paradise as the poetic genius itself, devoid of the temptations of a "sensible or purely sensuous fallen world"[18]. But the figurative language of the poem attacks the notion of an idealised, transcendental self because it frequently caters for a conditioned and finite other. At the centre of the Khan's landscape stands a pleasure dome, while at the centre of Eden grows the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The two trees exercise man's faculty for moral choice; the

dome caters for his sensuous task, and in fact Xanadu is a fallen landscape littered with insidious temptations.

Khan's world may pretend to imitate the garden of Eden with its vernal "gardens bright with sinuous rills" (8), but it is actually a manifestation of the dictator's own aggressive identity, conforming to his own desires and whims; Xanadu's prominent landmark is ordered by "decree" (2), and even the natural world itself is coerced to comply with the Khan's demands: "So twice five miles of fertile ground/With walls and towers were girdled round" (6-7). In other words Xanadu is afflicted by the limitations of a fallen consciousness which relates the world in the terms of property and ownership. The garden is an elitist area of land which is built for the sole purpose of intense self-indulgence. This demand for personal elevation and aggrandisement is a necessary condition of autonomous, self-fulfilling desire. Kubla "girdles" his domain with a circular figure, and in doing so, suppresses the anomalies which oppose his notions of order. As a result his carefully constructed paradise conceals the violence of its underlying energies.

Beneath the imagined paradise thus lurks a dark sexual energy, pounding behind the words with a foreboding rhythmical consistency. By the second stanza the narrative relents:

> But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
> Down the green hill athwart a cedern cover!
> A savage place! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon-lover! (12-16)

As the sexual impulse is released, language resists an enforced structural closure by pursuing its own performative instincts. The initial interjection-"But oh!"-represents a transvaluation of the prelapsarian intention in the previous stanza, so that the "chasm" functions as an entrance into a compulsive discourse of desire. Xanadu now becomes "A savage place!"-dominated by competing sexual egos which individually demand a personal gratification.

The metaphorical language of the poem assists in this breakdown of an idealised concept of transcendental secondary knowledge (as Coleridge defines it in the *Biographia*), by consistently directing the imagination back to its origins of hedonistic association. The overpowering momentum of the urgent phrase-"A savage place"-resists the imposition of its endstop in order to continue in the pursuit of a self-interested conclusion (realised in the image of the "woman wailing"): the subsequent adjectives "holy" and "enchanted" prove powerless in their attempt to redress this seductive figurative rhetoric and accordingly assume a parodic figurative context of their own (emphasised by the rhyming of "enchanted" with "haunted"). As a result they helplessly collaborate with the hypnotic cadences and inflections of the verse that they wish to conceal. The concluding metaphor completes the reversal of text and subtext in a usurpatory image of a fallen Eden, where the natural vigour of the moon is diminished by a ghastly shadow of daemonic craving. Fittingly the scene has its counterpart in *Paradise Lost* when the fallen Adam is overcome with a pagan lust as the voluptuous Eve inflames his "sense/With ardour to enjoy thee" (IX: 1032-3).

The text stands as a constant threat to Coleridge's conceptual premise of "imitation" because, rather than uncovering the internal principles of nature, Xanadu "copies" its external appearances

58

via an excitement of the senses. Lines 17-28 respond to the woman's urgent physical request in a vivid linguistic recreation of the sexual act:

> And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
> As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
> A mighty fountain momently was forced:
> Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
> Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
> Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail: (17-22)

Repressed energy, implicit in the phrase "with ceaseless turmoil seething" excites language into a state of muscular, monosyllabic thrusting (18). The poem now becomes enslaved to a rhythmic, vital beat where self-conscious contemplation is reduced to the mechanics of sensory involvement. This is further emphasised by the metaphor which conveys a strong sense of urgency and immediacy, portending the outcome of a compulsive, seismic eruption. The libidinal momentum is finally released in the following metaphor of lines 21-22 where the violence of the climactic moment has already been anticipated by a language that has become synonymous with power and violation: "mighty"; "forced"; "burst"; "Huge"; "vaulted"; "rebounding".

At this point it is crucial to note the significance of the central image of the river Alph. Many critics have interpreted the river as the unconscious operation of the unifying powers of the imagination which reconciles the opposites within the poem. Coleridge too regarded the general images of rivers as instrumental markers in poetry for "the one life". In the *Biographia*, Coleridge describes a stream as the inspiration behind his poem 'The Brook':

> I sought for a subject, that should give equal room and freedom for description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society, yet supply in itself a natural connection to the parts, and unity to the whole. Such a subject I conceived myself to have found in a stream, traced from its source in the hills among the yellow-red moss and conical glass-shaped tufts of bent, to the first break or fall, where its drops become audible, and it begins to form a channel...

Coleridge, as Holmes points out, never managed to complete 'The Brook' in the form that he hoped to: "Initially he had thought of a lengthy reflective poem, not unlike Cowper's 'The Task, which would use the evolution of the Holford stream to provide development and transitions which would not be 'abrupt and arbitrary'"[19]. However, as Holmes continues to suggest, "the controlling image of the river or stream occupied him throughout these months, and eventually emerged in 'Kubla Khan'"[20]. It is perhaps significant that the image of the river should eventually find fruition in a poem as diverse and arbitrary as 'Kubla Khan' after the personal failure of 'The Brook'. Far from imparting "unity" or "freedom", Xanadu's river is corrupted by its subterranean course which starves it of any natural light. In this way it is made analogous with the seditious activities of the underworld whose caves and caverns are traditionally the recesses for moral deprivation (cf: Milton's Pandemonium; Pope's Cave of Spleen; and Coleridge's own "uttermost cave/By misshaped prodigies beleaguered" in 'The Destiny of Nations' 100-1).

Idealising readings of 'Kubla Khan' tend to explain the significance of the river in the terms of Coleridge's later definition of the primary and secondary imagination in the *Biographia*. I. Chayes's interpretation of the poem involves mapping a three stage development which corresponds to Coleridge's own distinctions between the three perceptive faculties of the mind: the first stanza relates to the "work of the arranging and ornamental fancy"; the second stanza functions (through the image of the river) in accordance with "the autonomous and unconscious" operation of imagination; the final stanza demonstrating the imagination to be, in its highest form, a self-conscious activity:

> The last stanza...is concerned with a new creative process, governed by a purposive will, which would
> replace and correct the earlier process, autonomous and unconscious, or partially conscious, that was at
> work in the dream vision[21].

Chayes might be correct in emphasising the pivotal significance of the river in the poem as a whole, but she fails to account for the erotic and sensual connotations of the chasm which subverts and distorts Alph's symbolic course. Similarly, while she emphasises the "ornamental" nature of the Fancy, she does not explain its sexual aspect which is highly implicit in the pounding, rhythmic impulse of the initial stanza, and which is indeed responsible for the metaphorical manipulation of language in the remainder of the poem.

Alph's snaking course thus fails to establish a Fancy/Imagination distinction, anticipating the slippage of language inherent in the *Biographia* definition of the imagination. The river's first introduction in the poem is curiously curt: "Where Alph, the sacred river, ran/Through caverns measureless to man/Down to a sunless sea" (3-5). The expectation of further topographical description is halted by the resounding phrase-"Down to a sunless sea"-which metaphorically suggests a moral errancy as the river reaches a dim and stagnant conclusion. This, however, is almost immediately counterposed in the following line by the adjective "fertile" which suggests that the river is imparting a natural and innocent fecundity. Milton's Edenic river in *Paradise Lost* performs a similar horticultural function: just as Xanadu's garden is "bright with sinuous rills", Eden is irrigated by a river which, "with many a rill/Watered the garden" (IV: 229-30). But in such prelapsarian settings the serpent lurks, and in both cases it assumes the apparently innocuous form of the river. Milton's stream runs "with mazie error under pendant shades" (IV: 239); as Conrad argues:

> the noun ['error'], more unforgiving than Spenser's wayward delaying of his characters in Error's wood,
> reverts from the topographically errant to the morally erroneous and linguistically inserts sin into a
> world as yet ignorant of it; at the same time his adjective, converted to infernal uses, enables Coleridge
> to map his own hell of indulgent fantasy[22].

Language remains duplicitous to its very roots: the river fails to operate as a symbol because with all of its metaphorical implications, it has acquired an allegorical purport which forces a confrontation with what de Man describes as "the rhetoric of temporality":

Allegory involves the temporality of consciousness because it is a form of allusion to pre-existent texts. Xanadu's sacred river is thus perverted away from its symbolic course by a seductive figurative language which has its origins in associationistic Fancy. As the river metaphorically thrusts towards a self-gratifying orgasm and then, in the heady aftermath of fulfilment, winds down, language vigorously repeats itself, confirming the temporal predicament by allegorically referring to previous signs:

> And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
> It flung up *momently* the *sacred river.*
> Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
> Through wood and dale the *sacred river* ran,
> Then reached *the caverns measureless to man,*
> And sank in tumult *to a lifeless ocean.*[24]   (24-28)

The final phrase of the passage, "to a lifeless ocean", is a figurative reordering of the earlier words "to a sunless sea" (5). The opening stanza can now no longer be assimilated with Edenic, descriptive virtue because the language of the poem is working retroactively (as well as progressively) through a series of implied metaphors that refer back with the advantages of hindsight. This temporal perspective is enforced by the allegorical significance of the river which, as it concludes its self-motivated course, effectively sows the seed of forbidden knowledge, introducing into the text a sudden realisation of time and history: "And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far/Ancestral voices prophesying war!" (29-30). Again, the atavistic adjective "Ancestral" is an allegorical sign referring back to a previous adjective "ancient" (10) that has, in the first place, already anticipated the consequences of temporal fragmentation.

The river affirms the dualism within the poem by preventing the self from an illusory identification with the nonself. Stanza iii thus presents us with "The shadow of the dome of pleasure" (31). As the products of time, shadows distort and fragment the relationship between signifier and signified because they can never achieve a perfect consubstantiality with their corporeal counterparts. The adumbral image of the dome "floats" precariously on the water, subjected to both a temporal and spatial mutation. The dome now fails to function as an image of unification because it is consistently belied by the vicarious activities of its shadow. As the reflection frames the dome inside its own parameters, it fancifully disrupts the relationship between image and idea by creating a "metaphorical" representation of the dome. This slippage from faithful re-creation of internal perception to self-interested distortion of external appearance, is the necessary consequence of art: "It was a miracle of rare device,/A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!" (35-6) As a performative and arbitrary entity, language can blasphemously fuse together natural opposites, creating its own theatre of illusions. The oxymoron aptly suggests the irreversible dichotomy of words which, as metaphorical representations of ideas, act as shadows

rather than templates.

Stanza iv, in its recognition of loss and bereavement of vision brings the poem to an exquisite romantic conclusion. The inefficacy of words to represent faithfully the insouciant imagination is vividly articulated in lines 37-43:

> A damsel with a dulcimer
> In a vision once I saw:
> It was an Abyssinian maid,
> And on her dulcimer she played,
> Singing of Mount Abora.
> Could I revive within me
> Her symphony and song...

The vision depicts an emancipated and elusive representation of female otherness. The poem, on the contrary, is haunted by the dubious shadow of the wailing woman who functions only as a recipient of masculine domination.

If the speaker could incorporate the former's song into his own words, he could bring his verse to a unified, androgynous conclusion, devoid of the shadows and disseminations that already threaten it[25]. This potential, however, can never be fully realised because the vision will always be diminished by its translation into language. The maiden's stubborn refusal to be incorporated in the poem is a recognition of language's inability to represent her harmonious song. In fact she has already anticipated her linguistic falsification into the wailing demon by singing of the fallen mount of Abora (originally Amahra in the first draft, corresponding to Milton's false paradise Amara). The speaker can only overcome the disjunction between articulation and meaning by projecting himself into the non-existent time zone of the conditional: "To such a deep delight 'twould win me,/That with music loud and long,/I would build that dome in air,/That sunny dome! those caves of ice!" (44-7). This, of course, can only emphasise his failure in the present where he has unabashedly collaborated with the Khan's imperial desires. Indeed the final irony of the poem is that the potentate becomes the metaphorical representation of the speaker, a ghastly alter-ego or shadow which cannot be disburdened. Such a collaboration of subjective desire between Khan, the speaker of the poem, and the speaker of the preface, extends the figurative level of the poem from speaker as creator and master of metaphorical language, to speaker as product and victim of his own metaphorical language. R. Woodman asserts that "the will to metaphor may be described as Nietzsche describes 'the Will to Power'; the will to inhabit one's metaphorical invention of oneself"[26]. As an essentially figurative entity, language thus constitutes:

> a break, a fissure, a representation that is other than what is represented which is nevertheless unknowable except as it is represented. Cast out of nature by a consciousness alien to it, he (man) suffers the pain of alienation which is the pain of his own cast-out body, a body invaded by consciousness and subjected to its control. Metaphor, as Blondel aptly describes it, is a "quasi-hysterical and displaced language: it is the body's symptomatic *conversion* into language[27].

62

The first person narrative which would re-create the heavenly vision becomes, in the realisation of failure, complicit in the act of false creation. Coleridge can only desperately attempt to detach himself from the Khan's influence by rejecting him as a Medusa figure who must be avoided in order to preserve his own moral safety:

> And all who heard should see them there,
> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.   (47-54)

The repeated admonition half discloses the alluring fascination of the visionary Khan: appearing before the speaker as an overbearing and controlling necromancer, he reinforces the Bloomian suggestion that poetic enlightenment is a Pandemonium of flashing inspiration, where man can inhabit his self-fulfilling fantasies. The mind, as Satan articulates, "is its own place, and in itself/Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n" (*P.L*: I 254-5). Art can only mean a step towards the daemonic because language, as the metaphorical translation of perception, is contaminated by the shadows of human frailty. The poetic vision thus appears as the source of original sin, filling the speaker's soul with the fear of moral disintegration so that he must not look any further. In harnessing the power of romantic imagination in the language of men, the speaker has become the sacrificial victim of the visionary muse, damned as both a moral and literary postlapsarian, a son of Adam and a son of Milton.

IV

The final poem of the 1816 volume, 'Christabel', is similarly suspicious of the ability of poetic language to correspond directly to vision. Like 'The Pains of Sleep' and 'Kubla Khan', 'Christabel's incompletion attests to the impossibility of congruence between words and thoughts. This, as Janowitz argues, is significant specifically to the 1816 volume because:

> we find that the structure of spatial incompletion, of the incommensurateness of vision and language, is made into a major theme. The poems cannot end because the vision they aspire to cannot be embodied in language. Structural incompletion is bolstered by theme: the genre's obligatory element then, is the difficult relation between vision and language[28].

However, it is important to point out that whilst both 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel' dramatise the equivocal nature of poetic utterance, the manner in which they subvert their ideas is intrinsically different. 'Kubla Khan', being far less contrived in structure, immediately focuses on the problems of language which proves to be consistently elusive in representing the poet's intentions. 'Christabel', on the other hand, has a specific design and purpose, as Coleridge intimates, when reflecting on its incompletion in 1833:

> The reason of my not finishing 'Christabel' is not that I don't know how to do it- for I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could not carry on with equal success the execution of the Idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one (*Table Talk*: I 409-10).

Although the plan is never disclosed by Coleridge, the intended conclusion of 'Christabel' is, perhaps, inherent in the actual structure of the poem. 'Christabel' can be differentiated from 'Kubla Khan' in its emphasis on genre rather than poetic utterance. In the poem, as I intend to demonstrate, Coleridge by-passes the notion of poetic language as truth per se, and looks towards literary genres, with their solid claims to perform specific literary precedents, in order to regulate the inconsistencies of words. 'Christabel' specifically draws upon the mechanics of two literary genres, namely the gothic and the narrative romance. It is the complex interplay between the two genres within the poem and the resulting tensions that inevitably occur, that accounts for 'Christabel''s incompletion.

That Coleridge should resort to utilising the gothic genre so explicitly in a poem like 'Christabel' is interesting considering his own opinions on it. Writing on Radcliffe's *The Italian* in 1798, Coleridge disparagingly comments:

> It was not difficult to foresee that the *modern romance* ... would soon experience the fate of every attempt to please by what is unnatural, and by the departure from that observance of real life, which has placed the works of Fielding, Smollett, and some other writers, among the permanent sources of amusement. It might for a time afford an acceptable variety of persons whose reading is confined to works of fiction, and who would, perhaps, be glad to exchange dullness for extravagance; but it was probable that, as its constitution (if we may so speak) was maintained only by the passion of terror, and that excited by trick, and as it was not conversant in incidents and characters of a natural complexion, it would degenerate in repetition, and would disappoint curiosity[29].

The gothic imagination here is implicitly related to the workings of the fancy; it is a limited mode of operation that appeals to the external forms of perception. Unlike the true law of the poetic imagination, the gothic is capable of degenerating into self-enclosure or "repetition". By the time of *The Friend* Coleridge had cemented his views on the gothic as a purposeless expression of "pleasure without any exertion of thought" which, like the fancy, reduces its understanding "to a deplorable imbecility" (*Friend* II: 151). In the narrative of 'Christabel' I believe that Coleridge introduces the gothic as a debased form of literature whose particular inadequacies he hopes to reject by bringing his poem to a conclusion in the spirit of the narrative romance. The first part of the poem is thus set in a foreign, unlocalised gothic scenario which is distanced and objective; the second part is brought to earth in the detailed topography of Cumberland as the narrative moves

towards a subjective and conciliatory ending. However, 'Christabel''s conclusion, is more obviously dependent upon the suppression of comedy or romance-specifically Christabel's eventual rescue by her betrothed-whose omission renders 'Christabel' a fragment. The relationship between the genres within the poem proves more problematic in practice than in theory and perhaps can be understood in a closer examination of Coleridge's feelings towards gothic literature.

Reviewing Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794, Coleridge's approach towards the narrative is highly ambiguous, expressing a revulsion for the devised con-trick of the text, and yet simultaneously confessing a palpitating excitement for its hidden secrets:

> The same powers of description [as in *The Romance of the Forest*] are displayed, the same predilection is discovered for the wonderful and the gloomy-the same mysterious terrors are continually exciting in the mind the idea of a supernatural appearance, keeping us, as it were, upon the very edge and confines of the world of spirits...curiosity is kept upon the stretch from page to page, and from volume to volume, and the secret, which the reader thinks himself every instant on the point of penetrating, flies like a phantom before him, and eludes his eagerness till the very last moment of protracted expectation...This method is, however, liable to the following inconvenience, that in search of what is new, an author is apt to forget what is natural...Curiosity is raised far oftener than it is gratified; or rather, it is raised so high that no adequate gratification can be given it; the interest is completely dissolved once the adventure is finished, and the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which has bound him so strongly to it[30].

The prospect of obtaining the "secret" that lies behind the novel is recounted with a spellbinding fascination which stimulates the imagination. It is as if the reader is tantalisingly brought to the point of acquiring some prohibited source of knowledge. Importantly, Coleridge's objections do not call into question the imaginative power of the tale, rather they confirm the seductive power of the gothic imagination. Coleridge's criticism of gothic novels discloses an empathy for its illegitimate processes, delighting in the excitement of the sense of the forbidden which the narrative provides: in *The Friend* Coleridge describes the gothic as being "at once terrific and libidinous" (II: 11). Such an equivocality towards the genre is reflected in the narrative dimensions of 'Christabel' where the poetic imagination seems to be informed by a pervading gothic consciousness that proves impossible to shake off. Mario Praz's understanding of the gothic as "an anxiety with no possibility of escape"[31] serves as a useful description of 'Christabel': the gothic elements of the poem exert a stranglehold over the the narrative so that, in part two, the characters become incapacitated, ineffective in bringing the poem to its intended conclusion in romance. In accommodating the degenerate mode of the gothic within its own parameters, 'Chistabel' may be said ambitiously to set out on an early poetic version of the imagination/fancy distinction. Its failure to achieve this distinction is directly accountable for its incompletion and one can draw comparisons with the large Gothic cathedral that menacingly shadows Coleridge's definition of the imagination in chapter thirteen of the *Biographia*.

The most striking point of comparison between the prefaces of 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan' is the former's apparent clarity of expression and straightforwardness. The introduction to 'Christabel' appears to be devoid of the evasiveness and obscurities which haunt the narrative of its infamous counterpart: the whole passage is written in the first person singular; the late date of its publication is attributed directly to the speaker's "own indolence"; and the defence of the poem's originality is wholly and honourably vindicated. None of the doubts or excuses concerning the poem's merits

appear to be evident here. Such frankness, however, is unusual in Coleridge and ought to arouse suspicion, especially in his prefatory material which normally provides apologies and alibis for the nature of poetic utterance, and which often invokes bogus charges of plagiarism against himself (re: notes in 'The Nightingale' and 'Lines on an Autumnal Evening'). Plagiarism is not something that apparently worried Coleridge, a point which De Quincey echoes in his *Recollections*[32], and his elongated denial bears the mark of a man who, whilst protesting his innocence against any such spurious charges, simultaneously believes that a comparison with the alleged source will provide a worthy reflection of the aims of his own poem (the evidence of the date of composition would, after all, be ample in exculpating himself from any such accusations).

In the preface to 'Christabel', Coleridge's excuses for his poem have already been created for him by his critics, thus providing him with a subterfuge that he secretly delights in. The particular poem in question is Scott's 'Lay of the last Minstrel' which was actually composed in 1805 and influenced directly by 'Christabel' (and not the other way around). The poem dramatises a return to prominence of the lost values of a bygone age which were embodied in the unpretentious spirit of the romance ballads , and is brought into a "true picturesque unity" (a phrase Coleridge himself coined in his appreciation of Scott's poetry) by the chivalric values of the minstrel's final song:

> The present scene, the future lot,
> His toils, his wants, were all forgot;
> Cold diffidence, and age's frost,
> In the full tide of song were lost;
> Each blank, in faithless memory void,
> The poet's glowing thought supplied;
> And, while his harp responsive rung,
> 'Twas thus the LATEST MINSTREL sung.

A comparison with Scott's poem would not be wholly unfavourable to Coleridge in the sense that 'The Lay of the last Minstrel' successfully asserts the spirit of the narrative romance in its conclusion (reflecting Coleridge's own aims in 'Christabel'). This is evoked in the preface where Coleridge makes an indirect connection between his own poem and Scott's concerning the "tone and the spirit of the whole". However, in the first place Coleridge's poem remains a fragment, and secondly, the spirit of Scott's poem (even if it structurally resembles its counterpart) is hardly reminiscent of the anomalies of reality that plague the narrative of 'Christabel'. Furthermore Coleridge is apparently at no pains to establish any purpose of design behind his own poem that might contradistinguish it from its imitations, and almost allows its reputation to rest on the merits of these very imitations. His phraseology continually brings attention to "striking coincidence[s]"; and the "two monkish Latin hexameters" which he invokes, in an apparently magnanimous gesture-"'Tis mine and it is likewise yours;/But an if this will not do;/Let it be mine, good friend! for I/Am the poorer of the two"- are oddly, as E.H Coleridge notes, translated in November 1801, "long before the 'celebrated poets' in question had made, or seemed to make, it desirable to 'preclude a charge of plagiarism'"[33]. In this way they have the air of an almost pre-arranged alibi.

If Coleridge is again attempting to protect or disassociate himself from his own subject-matter, he ironically gives the reader an insight into the processes of his own poem when, introducing the

necessity to provide the exact date of the poem, he comments: "The dates are mentioned for the exclusive purpose of precluding charges of plagiarism or servile imitation from myself". As I shall argue in my exposition of 'Christabel', the theft is not from others, but more dangerously from the the recesses of the speaker's own mind which manifests itself fully in the gothic elements of the poem. This naturally complicates the relationship between the gothic and the romance genres within the poem because the gothic can now be recognised as an explicitly subjective model of reality. This is reflected in the nature of the narrative which eschews such simple categorisations of white and black, good and evil, subjective and objective, Christabel and Geraldine etc, and which suggests that Geraldine is most intimately related to her counterpart as a phantom-like manifestation of Christabel's own sub-conscious. The narrative of the poem is, accordingly, perverted away from the chivalric motive of the romance text in part two, and controlled by the more sinister and transgressive designs of a dominating gothic consciousness.

The opening paradoxes of 'Christabel' immediately bring the reader into the alien and external landscape of a gothic setting. The birds of the night have awoken the birds of the day; the "mastiff bitch" is aware of a presence that is most obviously supernatural: "Some say, she sees my lady's shroud" (13); and the moon, although full, remains "both small and dull" (19). The series of antitheses most obviously creates the sort of devised scenario which would be familiar to readers of gothic novels. This ambiguity is heightened by the narrator of the poem who continually prompts the reader's curiosity into expecting something beyond the normal experience of reality: "What makes her in the wood so late,/A furlong from the castle gate?" (25-6); "Jesu, Maria, shield her well" (54); "What sees she there?" (57). At this early stage in the poem the narrator's interruptions merely lend the narrative an air of fiction, briefly holding up events in order to "excite by trick" and thereby inducing an atmosphere of suspense. This technique is, of course, precisely what Coleridge himself objected to in his own criticisms of the gothic genre, in its unnatural stimulation of the passions. The gothic is therefore being evoked as a degenerate sub-genre which is incapable of representing a human condition because it is necessarily external to the realms of human experience. This is emphasised by the entrance of Christabel within this externalised scenario. Christabel's representation is consistent with the female protagonists of the narrative romance: her dream of marriage is a hint of the manner in which the narrative intends to conclude in the conciliatory spirit of the romance; and her prayer is an intensely subjective mode of experience which protects her from the disquieting atmosphere of the setting in its meditative silence. Such Christian fortitude is neatly symbolised by the act of praying because first, it emphasises an inner communion with God; and secondly because it directly contrasts the ambiguity of the setting where language appears unstable and mutable in its rhetorical self-inquisitions ("Is the night chilly and dark?" (14); "Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?" (44)). Christabel is thus a Spenserian Una-devout, focused and unchangeable.

Geraldine, by contrast, fits into the gothic surroundings far more easily. Christabel herself is not described, but with the introduction of Geraldine appearance becomes important. Geraldine, like the landscape, is externalised:

> There she sees a damsel bright,
> Drest in a silken robe of white,
> That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
> The neck that made that white robe wan,

67

> Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
> Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,
> And wildly glittered here and there
> The gems entangled in her hair.   (58-65)

Her white robe-normally indicative of purity-is deceptive as it casts a shadow, and her exceeding beauty already arouses the suspicion that she may be a literary descendant of the mutable Duessa. Not surprisingly, her command of language is highly proficient. She responds to Christabel's question "with answer meet" (71), and her story is eloquently recited. However, as Peterfreund observes, it is also explicitly metaphorical:

> The notion that Geraldine's abductors would drive their captive rather than lead her is troublesome. After all, if her horse were to break away or fall, they would lose what would appear to be a great prize, if Geraldine is to be credited. But Geraldine is not to be credited. If she moves like the wind, it is the result of being driven by a chariot that "forth rush'd with whirlwind sound" (*PL* 6.749). Those who drive her are not five abductors riding furiously, but the "four cherubic shapes" (6.753) of the Chariot of Judgement and the Son who commands them[34].

Geraldine is being made analogous with the perfidious Satan of *Paradise Lost* and her entrance into the narrative aligns the gothic element of the text with a newly found motive. The "secret" behind gothic novels, which Coleridge found so enthralling, is transformed into a source of forbidden knowledge, and it is Christabel's gradual acquisition of this knowledge that changes the initial presentation of the gothic as an external and foreign model of perception, into a dangerously subjective reflection of truth.

The first evidence of this is when Christabel "with might and main/Lifted her up, a weary weight,/Over the threshold of the gate" (130-2). The marriage theme, which was earlier represented as the culmination of the romance narrative in Christabel's dream, is here being perverted away from its natural conclusion into a horrific metaphoric parody. The allusion is continued when, bearing in mind that it has just struck twelve midnight, Christabel declares that her mother "on her death-bed she did say,/That she should hear the castle-bell/Strike twelve upon my wedding-day" (199-201). Geraldine's subsequent dismissal of Christabel's guardian-spirit-"'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine-/Though thou her guardian-spirit be,/Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me'" (211-13)-renders the innocent maid wholly susceptible to the seductive lure of knowledge. Christabel now acquires a curiosity that is the fatal flaw of the gothic heroines. Her mind becomes restless and perturbed and this represents a fracturing of the wholeness of the self which was initially evoked in her silent act of prayer. As a result she cannot prevent herself from glancing at the naked form of Geraldine:

> Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
> And slowly rolled her eyes around;
> Then drawing in her breath aloud,
> Like one that shuddered, she unbound
> The cincture from beneath her breast:

Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side-
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!   (245-54)

The passage dramatises Christabel's initiation into a universe of sin and her metaphorical marriage to the dark meaning behind the figure of Geraldine. The offending half of the temptress, as a deleted line informs us, is "lean and old and foul of hue", revealing perhaps that Christabel now has knowledge of life and death and that her previously spiritual probity is about to undergo a similar decay. When Geraldine declares: "In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,/Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!/Thou knowst to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,/This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow" (267-70); the tranference is complete and Christabel accordingly has the power to speak the language of her newly acquired knowledge.

The narrative romance element of the poem is thus halted in its tracks because Christabel, the genre's initial representative, has become Geraldine, the representative of the gothic element. Geraldine, having presented to Christabel what was already present in Christabel's own mind, has enslaved the narrative of the poem to a dominating gothic presence which is, like Geraldine's curse, the master of its speech. This is made explicit at the very beginning of part two of the poem when the Baron pronounces "Each matin bell.../Knells us back to a world of death" (332-3). The lines are suggestive of a passage in *Paradise Lost* where the fallen angels traverse

O'er many a Frozen, many a Fiery Alp,
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death,
A Universe of death, which God by curse
Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,
Perverse all monstrous, all prodigious things,
Abominable, unutterable, and worse
Than Fables have yet feigned, or fear conceiv'd.   (II: 620-27)

As Peterfreund explains: "If the universe of *Christabel* is a "Universe of death", then, it is so because some evil cause is immanent in it, just as Satan and his legions are immanent in their universe as the cause both of its existence and of the nature of that existence"[35]. What has happened in the story is that evil has manifested itself through the seduction of Christabel by Geraldine. The idealised conclusion of the poem is now an insuperable task because its motive (embodied by the unified figure of Christabel) has been dispaced by the anxieties of a fallen-consciousness which "knells" the narrative of the poem back to the degenerate origins of the gothic imagery with which it began. The problem the poem seems to have set itself, and fails to solve, is that if the state of grace corresponds to an innocent vision and the fall of man is a fall away from that vision, is it ever possible for the innocent to redeem the experienced? Interpretations which postulate Coleridge's intended conclusion miss the point: the poem cannot be completed because

paradise cannot be regained.

Bard Bracy's dream allegorises the entrapment of the narrative to the sinister forces that have insiduously exerted their influence. The dove, which represents Christabel, is discovered in the vision to be a victim of the tyrannous power of the serpent:

> 'And in my dream methought I went
> To search out what might there be found;
> And what the sweet bird's trouble meant,
> That thus lay fluttering on the ground.
> I went and peered, and could descry
> No cause for her distressful cry;
> But yet for her dear lady's sake
> I stooped, methought, the dove to take,
> When lo! I saw a bright green snake
> Coiled around its wings and neck.   (541-50)

Bracy's account demonstrates how deceptive appearances can be, and it is only after closer examination that he notices the bird's entrapment in the coils of the snake. What is more alarming, however, is the following description which reveals the initial stages of a process of "becoming", as the bird's breathing patterns are synchronised with those of the serpent: "And with the dove it heaves and stirs,/Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!" (553-4). The dream episode is emblematic of the whole poem and this is emphasised by the Baron's response to it. Failing to take heed of the Bard's warning about appearances he, only "half-listening" (565), wilfully misreads the vision and assimilates the dove with Geraldine rather than his own daughter. The Baron evokes the spirit of chivalry in his "courtly accents fine" (568), but he has blindly misinterpreted Geraldine's motives. When she responds to the Baron in like manner-"With blushing cheek and courtesy fine" (575), romance is consequently choked to death within the narrative because it is wholly appropriated by the dark and duplicitous nature of a gothic consciousness.

Because the gothic is now recognisable as a highly subjective mode of experience which is at the centre of the characters' conditions, it realises a destructive potential which goes beyond the boundaries of credibility that apply even to the gothic prose tales. This is powerfully evoked by the hideous transformation of Christabel into the double of Geraldine which, effectively, merges together the supposedly separate states of the real and the imaginary:

> So deeply had she drunken in
> That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
> That all her features were resigned
> To this sole image in her mind:
> And passively did imitate
> That look of dull and treacherous hate!   (601-6)

Christabel undergoes the punishment meted out to Milton's Satan, finally revealing that light and dark, far from being polar opposites, are schizophrenic counterparts. The narrative of 'Christabel', which had hoped to disassociate the imagination from a gothic intelligence by concluding in the wholesome spirit of the romance, actually discloses the poetic faculty's intimate relationship with the seditious energies of the gothic's transgressive purposes.

Coleridge believed that the gothic tale was incapable of articulating any moral truth, but the narrative of 'Christabel' seems to suggest that it is the very nature of poetic language itself that is responsible for an explicit moral renunciation. The 'Conclusion to Part II' appears to be a comment, not on moral truth, but on a truth about the irreconcilable disjunctions between willed thought and meaning:

> And pleasures flow in so thick and fast
> Upon his heart, that he at last
> Must needs express his love's excess
> With words of unmeant bitterness.
> Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
> Thoughts so all unlike each other;
> To mutter and mock a broken charm,
> To dally with wrong that does no harm.
> Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty
> At each wild word to feel within
> A sweet recoil of love and pity.   (662-72)

The passage can be seen as referring not only to Leoline, but to Coleridge himself who effectively fathers the poem. Poetic language proves to be "wild" and uncontrollable in its revealing of subconscious anxieties and neuroses. Within its ambiguous parameters moral precepts are imbued with the "sorrow and shame" (674) of a "world of sin" (673), transforming them into horrific parodies which belie their intentions. A poem is thus "A little child, a limber elf,/Singing, dancing to itself" (656-7), creating its own laws and fantasies and, for the moral safety of its author, it must be rejected.

III

'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'

I

> In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (*BL:* II 6)

In his famous pronouncement on his poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', Coleridge intimates that in momentarily suspending a disbelief in the supernatural phenomena of the poem, the reader might grasp a semblance of the inner unity that is the guiding spirit behind the act of poesis. The sentence is important because it hints at the moral function that Coleridge believes poetry ought to possess, and he expounds upon this point explicitly two or three pages later:

> What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts and emotions of the poet's own mind. The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of a man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. (*BL:* II 15-16)

As a "modifying & fusing" power, imagination encourages a unity of the self which corresponds to the unity of the poem. The reader of 'The Ancient Mariner' can, if he/she suspends his/her disbelief in the extraneous matter of the poem, partake of this unashamedly moral power and thereby gain a poetic faith. The crucial factor behind this poetic communion of reader and poet is the want to achieve this subjective truth, the act of "willing", which releases the "ab initio, identical and incoherent" self-consciousness. Poetry is thus the vehicle for making conscious the process of perception that has become, through time and custom, unconscious. Its function is to move the reader one step further up the Ascent of Being and, in this respect, it is explicitly didactic.

Strange then that, some thirteen years after justifying 'The Ancient Mariner's' position within the scheme of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge should charge his poem of having too much moral:

> Mrs Barbauld once told me that she admired the Ancient Mariner very much, but there were two faults in it-it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my judgement the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Nights' tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well... (*Table Talk*: II 100)

Coleridge has flippantly divorced the *Biographia* sentiment that imagination and morality are naturally aligned and, in doing so, has reduced the intended purpose of his poem to the status of mere fable. Such a blatant retraction of his previously quoted poetic theory should immediately arouse suspicion: in the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge has asked his readers to "suspend their disbelief" in the supernatural elements of the poem in order that they might share in the inner truths that are symbolically embedded within it; here, on the other hand, he implicitly encourages a reading that goes no further than accepting the poem on its own superstitious terms. The reason behind this poetic apostasy is, perhaps, implicit in the subsequent invocation of the tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Throughout his life Coleridge would remain fascinated by the impact that the stories made upon him as a child and, in a particularly revealing letter to Thomas Poole, he describes the book's irresistible allure:

> ...and then I found the Arabian Nights' entertainments-one tale of which (the tale of a man who was compelled to seek for a pure virgin) made so deep an impression on me (I had read it in the evening while my mother was mending stockings) that I was haunted by spectres, whenever I was in the dark-and I distinctly remember the anxious & fearful eagerness, with which I used to watch the window, in which the books lay-& whenever the Sun lay upon them, I would seize it, carry it by the wall, & bask, and read. (*CL*: I 347)

The passage metaphorically enacts a mini-fall where the victim, at once disturbed and attracted by the volume's air of mystery, is compelled, at last, to apprehend its forbidden secrets and, in doing so, is exposed to the hauntings of his own imagination. As Holmes suggests: "The childish mixture of fantasy and superstition is acutely recalled: the beautiful virgin who is also a fearful spectre; the relentless moving finger of the sun which is also a kind of benevolent protecting power...are themes that Coleridge would carry into his adult poetry of his late twenties, in 'Christabel' and the *Ancient Mariner*"[1]. Coleridge's experiences with the haunting narratives of *The Arabian Nights* prove, evidently, to be a formative influence on his own poetic development, revealing to the fascinated reader, not just a series of pleasurably exciting stories, but an insight into his very own labyrinthine imagination.

Behind the jocularity of Coleridge's response to Mrs Barbauld is thus an arcane tension between his proposed theories of what poetry ought to achieve, and the reality of what his poems actually dramatise. Coleridge may secretly share with Mrs Barbauld the suspicion that his poem has belied its own intentions and has eradicated its own moral purpose by releasing powers that are beyond his control. The subterfuge is to pretend that the poem should not really have a moral at all, and that its supposedly overbearing moral sentiment obstructs what should be a non-instructive tale of fantasy and superstition. If, at this point, we return to the more ingenuous *Biographia* explanation

of 'The Ancient Mariner' we can see that it is already wary of such moral obfuscation in the foreboding words "these shadows of imagination". The phrase recalls a moment at the beginning of the second chapter of the *Biographia*, where Coleridge explains the "*supposed irritability of men of genius*":

> A debility and dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses, do, we well know, render the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism. Having a deficient portion of internal and proper warmth, minds of this class seek in the · crowd *circa fana* [around the temples] for a warmth in common, which they do not possess singly. Cold and phlegmatic in their own nature, like damp hay, they heat and inflame by co-acerva-tion; or like bees they become restless and irritable through the increased temperature of collected multitudes. Hence the German word for fanaticism (such at least was its original import) is derived from the swarming of bees, namely, Schwarmen, Schwarmerey. The passion being in an inverse proportion to the insight, *that* the more vivid, as *this* the less distinct. (*BL*: I 30-1)

This passage is important because it provides an insight into the naturally dichotomous nature of a poet. Coleridge proposes that a poet has two distinct sides to his character: passion and insight. When passion is in an unbalanced proportion to insight, genius is diminished because it is rendered susceptible to fanaticism. Coleridge goes on to explain that the men of true genius are of calm and tranquil temper and that this is reflected in their writing so that their passion is adequately controlled. Coleridge reserves this accolade of commanding genius for the likes of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton. However, he also describes an intermediate state of mind where the balance between passion and insight is precariously balanced:

> These in tranquil times are formed to exhibit a perfect poem in palace or temple or landscape garden; or a tale of romance in canals that join sea with sea, or in walls of rock, which shouldering back the billows imitate the power, and supply the benevolence of nature to sheltered navies; or in aqueducts that arching the wide vale from mountain to mountain give a Palmyra to the desert. But alas! in times of tumult they are the men destined to come forth as the shaping spirit of Ruin, to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of a day, and to change kings and kingdoms, as the wind shifts and shapes the clouds. (*BL*: I 32-3)

Unassured of his own particular genius, such a poet treads a fine line between complete inner belief and the various neuroses and deficiencies of character that can destroy such belief. Coleridge's description of the virtuous poetry which communicates a sympathetic appreciation of nature, laconically meanders from one natural description to the next. This, however, suddenly gives way to an urgent, bombastic narrative which is both wilfully creative and violently iconoclastic, demonstrating language's attraction to images of power and elitism. Coleridge is here revealing his own truths, implicitly disclosing the nature of his own tortured mind. His genius reveals itself in similar images of power and destruction within his own poetry because it contrasts with his Christian beliefs that are firmly embedded within his ideal of poetic language. His genius, therefore, tends to burst out all the more violently because it is repressed by his own moral edicts.

The pattern of 'The Ancient Mariner', as I intend to demonstrate, follows precisely this seemingly endless struggle of irreconcilable tensions, as the imagination's attraction to the pagan myths and

superstitions reveals an ineradicable human depravity that can never be contained by the symbolic Christian framework of the poem. Like the fanatic, the Mariner is attracted "circa fana" (he interrupts the wedding ceremony) so that he might free himself of the burden of his own chronic individuality. This individuality is heretical because it advocates a complete independence from the codes and restrictions of Christian belief. Accordingly it is presented within the poem as the source of forbidden knowledge that is transferred from poet to Mariner, Mariner to Wedding-Guest, and so on, with the result that the poem must continually be revised as it is caught in the trap of its own fallenness. More so than even 'Kubla Khan' or 'Christabel', 'The Ancient Mariner' dramatises the impossibility of conjoining poetic theory and practice, because, even in its completion, it reveals itself to be ultimately fragmented.

II

In his New Historicist approach to 'The Ancient Mariner', Jerome McGann argues that the poem is structured around a gradation of authoritative layers that are each imbued with a historical self-consciousness. Each layer sheds a historical light on the previous one so that the poem embarks upon a process of evolution which unearths its origins in the textual history of ancient ballad and develops via "a perpetual process of becoming", into a work where "various meanings apparently alien to each other", can be "reconciled and harmonised":

> By the time Coleridge has "evolved" his 1817 text, we are able to distinguish four clear layers of development: (a) an original mariner's tale; (b) the ballad narrative of that story; (c) the editorial gloss added when the ballad was, we are to suppose, first printed; and (d) Coleridge's own point of view on his invented materials[2].

According to McGann the final development represents Coleridge's "special religious/symbolic theory of interpretation founded upon his own understanding of the Higher Critical analytic"[3] of German philosophical thought. This argument allows McGann to conclude that the poem "imitates or represents a process of textual evolution, and the symbolic meaning of that process *has* a symbolic value and meaning, that is, a religious, a Christian, and ultimately a redemptive meaning"[4]. In other words, the text overcomes its superstitious subject-matter by integrating it within a higher Christian formula that both informs and redeems it.

McGann's theory of the poem relies primarily on the distance that each layer creates, in turn, from the previous one so that the poem achieves, in some sense, a historical perspective whereby the "ideological structure of its symbolist procedures"[5] can be continually revised. Such an interpretation, however, cannot be achieved without deferring the control the poet has over his own work, to the end of the historical completion of the text. By containing Coleridgean agency within the imaginative construction of the ballad itself, McGann neatly side-steps the issue of a pervading daemonic consciousness which consistently haunts the narrative. The effect of containing such subversion can ultimately only serve to re-establish it more vociferously[6]. In 'The Ancient Mariner',

the various levels of historical distinction that McGann perceives are, in fact, a complex process of impersonalisation which attempt to evade the question of poetic ownership. In this way they function in like manner to the disclamatory preface of 'Kubla Khan', rather than acting as a modifying power that brings discordant elements of the poem into a unified whole.

The title of the poem initially appears in the 1798 version of the *Lyrical Ballads* as "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere". However, under the insistence of Wordsworth, in the 1800 text it has changed to "A Poet's Reverie". The text is now no longer the Mariner's own narration and he must speak through his creator, hence his story is now contained in quotation marks. That Coleridge felt a certain discomfort in narrating his own poem is emphasised in the alteration of the Argument. In the 1798 version Coleridge can distance himself from his poem by creating a mythical barrier where events are sufficiently mystified by an archaic diction.

> How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

However, in the 1800 text the Mariner is made directly responsible for the "strange things" that accompany the journey:

> How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a Sea-bird and how he was followed by many and strange Judgements: and in what manner he came back to his own Country.

The result of modernising the style of the argument is to reduce the effect of historical distance between poet and persona. The argument of 1798, in its mysterious introduction of ancient ballad material ("the strange things that befell"), effectively relieves the poet of the responsibility of morally qualifying his own material: the Mariner can relate his own tale and can accept the blame for the disturbing forces that threaten to subsume it. In the 1800 argument, on the other hand, text and author now become perilously close and Coleridge feels the necessity to pre-judge the Mariner in order to exculpate his own imagination from any charge of daemonic possession.

The 1817 version of 'The Ancient Mariner' both restores its initial title and dispenses with the prefatory Argument. The latter is replaced by a marginal gloss which commentates on the poetry as it goes along. McGann interprets the gloss as a level of authority within the text that assumes the part of a "fictive editor", through whom Coleridge may, ventriloquistically, make explicit "his religious theory of interpretation", which has its roots in "the Higher Critical tradition"[7]. But the gloss, as a number of commentators have pointed out[8], fails adequately to represent the process of the poetry itself, rather its purpose seems specifically designed to mollify or alter the events it is describing. The gloss provides the moral sentiment that has been perverted beyond all recognition in the narrative itself and thus its presence is deployed to cure the poem's spiritual deficiencies by attaching to it a meaning it does not possess. As a "level of authority", the gloss encourages a reading of the poem as a symbolist dramatic monologue where personality is extinguished.

However, it brings acute attention to itself by its very presence and, in doing so, consistently reminds us that it is a fabricated alibi. The gloss is a self-conscious attempt to expound the poetic theory that the poem has forsaken, and is thus a potential escape-route for the poet to disassociate himself from the nightmare visions of his own imagination.

The marginal gloss is part of a process of continual textual editing that the poem undergoes from its initial publication in 1798, through its various other manifestations until 1828. The alterations effected by these revisions continually bring attention to the crucial issue that 'The Ancient Mariner' is a fable that must be related compulsively without end. Each revision does not lend a clearer meaning to the poem but, on the contrary, de-stabilises identity to the extent that it becomes increasingly fragmented. Furthermore, as Wallen comments:

> Corresponding with these textual problems is the issue that arises when Coleridge's name is attached to the revisions of the poem. Because of the textual instability brought on by continual revision, any assumption regarding an authorial priority, or even an authorial identity, breaks down into questions of how one text should be juxtaposed to another. In other words, the author of this poem is not simply an object of discernment that exists beyond the text, but is, instead, the text that continually revises itself[9].

The poem may be read as essentially Coleridgean to the point that both Mariner and Wedding-Guest are Coleridge. In other words the verse is a dialogue between Coleridge the serpent and Coleridge the innocent; Coleridge as Satan and Coleridge as Eve. Such reflexivity means that the poem can never purge itself of its own sin for, just as Coleridge entraps his own creation, the Mariner, inside an allegorical version of the fall of man, the Mariner, in turn, condemns the Wedding-Guest to the same fate. This continual mirroring of experience, whereby author, protagonists (and by implication reader) undergo some sort of dreadful recognition, distorts the concept of linear time-where events may be brought to a resolvable conclusion-because it implicates everybody simultaneously. In reciting his story, the Mariner is not only reliving a former experience, he is forcing his auditor to live it for him. As a direct consequence of this, the Wedding-Guest's experiencing consciousness (which I consider to be the crucial subtext of the poem) participates so intimately inside the narrative that it continually prevents the Mariner from achieving salvation. The poem, as a result, is influenced as much by experiences beyond its own narrative as by those within it. My own interpretation of the poem will rely heavily upon these tensions between textual absences and presences and how they prevent poetic language, from arriving at any definitive meaning. The more the poem attempts to revise and correct itself, the more it can only, as a consequence, reinfect itself.

III

For this reason 'The Ancient Mariner' cannot be read as a poem of restoration where its central character undergoes, in the words of Kitson, a "process of individual and internal redemption"[10].

W. M Alcorn similarly, in denying that 'The Ancient Mariner' is either a "narcissistic fantasy", or an "Oedipal nightmare", interprets the poem as:

> the dramatisation (in symbols) of a universal developmental process. Coleridge discussed the process in theological terms: the movement from original sin to redemption. I suggest that the symbology portrays original sin as an expression of narcissistic incompletion; similarly, it grasps redemption as the sublimated recovery of an original narcissism. The poem thus portrays narcissistic "symptoms" or "traits". But these "symptoms" are not representations of Coleridge's personal pathology; they are universal steps in human development[11].

The "symbology", however, that Alcorn believes brings the poem to an eventual redemption, is undermined by what Conrad describes as a "dual conveyancing of proscribed meanings" within 'The Ancient Mariner', "from teller to hapless auditor, and from the poem to the marginal prose"[12]. Original sin, in other words, cannot be contained by the symbolic framework of the poem because it is involved in the act of transmission. The "symptoms" of narcissism, in this respect, are the disease of the poem because they are presented in the terms of man's tragic compulsion to receive knowledge, and they invest the narrative with a subversive, allegorical power.

This is made evident in the initial exchange between the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest. In soliciting the attention of his auditor, the Mariner has hoped to establish a relation between himself and another that will give him meaning and direct his narration into a symbolic structure of union and progressive understanding. However, he manages only to communicate a sense of his own self-obsession and this is made explicit in the disruption of the marriage service. Marriage, as Coleridge comments in his essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, lends the individual a natural morality:

> It is inevitable to every noble mind, whether man or woman, to feel itself, of itself, imperfect and insufficient, not as an animal only, but as a moral being. How wonderfully, then, has Providence contrived for us, by making that which is necessary to us as a step in our exaltation to a higher and nobler state! The Creator has ordained that one should possess the qualities which the other has not, and the union of both is the most complete ideal of human character. In everything the blending of the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight. Who shall dare to stand alone, and vaunt himself, in himself, sufficient? In poetry it is the blending of passion with order that constitutes perfection: this is still more the case in morals, and more than all in the exclusive attachment of the sexes. (*Lects 1808-19*: II 498)

The Mariner, on the contrary, detains the Wedding-Guest on the solipsistic grounds of his own compulsive narrative. He is already prepared "to stand alone", and his repudiation of communal sympathy hints at the dark, amoral nature of his imagination. The Wedding-Guest's failure to resist the Mariner's tale can be understood in terms of the tension between presence and absence: the Mariner's present portrait is continuously deferred or absent, or reduced to the momentary intensity of a "glittering eye". His visions of anguish represent the compulsive re-emergence of the repressed. The Mariner, in other words, is actually a figurative manifestation of the Wedding-Guest: he represents a repressed alter-ego whom the latter has yet to come to terms with. The Wedding-Guest's fascination with the Mariner is, ultimately, a fascination with himself and is, thus, an act of narcissism. Similarly, when the Mariner passes on his affliction to the Wedding-Guest

and achieves, at last, a stable identity, he knows it shall not be for very long because his auditor now represents a deferred, or "absent", version of himself that will once again resurface. In approaching the Wedding-Guest in the first place he is, effectively, reapproaching himself as text to be re-read.

The Wedding-Guest's initial attempts to resist the Mariner's advances are ultimately futile: first he explains his position in the matrimonial gathering; secondly, when this fails, he orders him physically to release him. But the Mariner does not require physical dominance to ensure his auditor's attention and he has already anticipated the Wedding-Guest's morbid fascination to acquire a prohibited knowledge in the latter's earlier inquisitory comment "Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?" (4). The Mariner can thus hypnotically transfix the Wedding-Guest in the dazzling allure of his gaze which, like the potentate's "flashing eyes" in 'Kubla Khan', offer the visionary promise of a forbidden paradise:

> He holds him with his glittering eye-
> The Wedding-Guest stood still,
> And listens like a three years' child:
> The Mariner hath his will.   (13-16)

The Wedding-Guest "cannot choose but hear" (18) the Mariner's tale as he is mentally imprisoned by his own subconscious desire to taste the secrets of creation. He suspects that what he is about to hear will be an education in evil, but he cannot prevent himself from transgressing into this perditious narrative. As soon as the bassoon sounds the union of the wedded couple, it ironically knells him into the "world of death" of the Mariner's nightmares. His own moral safety threatened, the Wedding-Guest beats his breast in protestation, but still he is irresistibly compelled, in anticipation, to gaze in wonder at the infernal visions of his detainer.

Because both speaker and auditor are participants in a dialectic in which each depends on the other as the antithesis that defines the self, meaning within the poem cannot be fixed. The language of the poem can no longer function symbolically because the tale may be read as either (a): the original account of the Mariner; or (b): the allegorical dramatisation of the mind of the Wedding-Guest. This duplicity of understanding means that the poem can never reach its symbolic redemption because it is always shadowed by an absent text that consistently asserts itself from the margins. The Mariner cannot be expiated from his sins because the shadow of his own consciousness (which is the experiencing consciousness of the Wedding-Guest) will always catch him up in his own present narrative.

The first forty lines of the poem take the Wedding-Guest to the brink of otherness, and his subsequent plunge into the story lends the narrative almost immediately a power that threatens to de-stabilise the symbolic framework of the text. Allegorised as the STORM-BLAST (and later as LIFE-IN-DEATH), the "absent" text begins its pursuit of the "present" text:

> He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
> And chased us south along.

> With sloping masts and dipping prow,
> As who pursued with yell and blow
> Still treads the shadow of his foe,
> And forward bends his head,
> The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
> And southward aye we fled.   (43-50)

The Mariner has hoped that the participation of his auditor within his story will lend the narrative a communal meaning which will enable the former to escape from his perpetual nightmare. However, the narration instead, proves a continual critique of any such possibility of relation which is made explicit in the extensive revision that the stanzas undergo. In the 1798 version of the text the Mariner attempts to turn his narration into what Wallen describes as "an act of communication, to provide his listener with the details of an experience that would then become not the experience of isolation or loss"[13]:

> Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,
> A Wind and Tempest strong!
> For days and weeks it play'd us freaks-
> Like Chaff we drove along.   (40-43)

The 1817 version of the poem, however, has dispensed with the communicative "Listen, Stranger!", and has also personified the 'Storm and Wind' into the STORM-BLAST. The effect of this is to retract any form of redemptive communication by allowing language allegorically to transform the auditor's "absent" ego into a "present" one within the text itself. Throughout the poem we will see how allegorical or metaphorical language becomes an entry point for the Wedding-Guest's experiencing consciousness to assert itself from the margins and become a present force within the text itself. Consequently, as the Mariner relates the historical events of his tale and hopes to bring this chapter of his life to a conclusion by discovering some moral truth, he is prevented from doing so as the narrative suddenly acquires an immediacy which forces him to relive his vision of anguish. The Mariner's ship is thus no longer driven along by its crew, on the contrary, it is controlled and directed by the unnatural force of the STORM-BLAST which leads him, once again, into the act of original sin.

The landscape of the poem, as a result, is reshaped in a maniacal assertion of ego that attempts to supersede the natural sublimity of Godly creation. The powerful description of the ice in lines 54-62 exaggerates the actuality of the perceived object so that it becomes an independent entity, willed into an exclusive poetic existence by the incantatory nature of language:

> The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around:
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound!   (59-62)

80

This non-acceptance of nature as the symbolic order of God manifests itself more vociferously in the killing of the albatross. The bird, in all its natural magnificence, embodies the later definition of the primary imagination, not only superstitiously, but imaginatively making the "breeze to blow" (94) as it, in the bond between subject and object, unconsciously enacts the infinite act of creation. The Mariner knows that if he could retract his deed in the retelling of his tale, he would consequently achieve an identity in its fullest sense. He does, in fact, already illustrate in his narration a recognition of the albatross as a symbol of redemption in his hospitality towards it: "And every day, for food or play,/Came to the mariner's [singular] hollo!" (73-4). The actual shooting of the bird, however, and the reasons behind it are curiously omitted. This is because the act of destruction is imaginatively supplied by the Wedding-Guest. His interruption signifies his integration within the text as a willing participant rather than a coerced listener:

> 'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
> From the fiends, that plague thee thus!-
> Why look'st thou so?'-With my cross-bow
> I shot the ALBATROSS.   (79-82)

The hiatus of the penultimate line, which divides the speech of the two personae so that they metrically mirror each other (and thus momentarily become each other), represents a transmission which facilitates the now metaphorical destruction of the albatross. The Mariner, therefore, cannot escape from his initial crime because he is forced to relive his nightmare via the agency of his auditor who continually reinfects the narrative with his fallen consciousness.

This becomes increasingly explicit in the narrative where the nightmare visions continually resurface, even when salvation appears imminent. As the Mariner attempts to move his narrative forwards and away from his initial act of sin, the language of the poem is always allegorically interpreting events according to that very act as it accommodates the experiencing consciousness of the auditor. In other words, the poem is functioning both diachronically (the Mariner's historical development) and synchronically (the Wedding-Guest's immediate reaction to events). Having afflicted the Wedding-Guest with an acute awareness of his own autonomy, the Mariner's story is supplemented by his auditor's silence. It is a silence which, as Galperin notes: "effectively signals that subversion is at work: a silence that does no less and ultimately no more than envelop a text as does the Wedding-Guest, whose 'wisdom' is clearly many things"[14].

The Wedding-Guest's muted participation within the poem lends the text an immediacy and vividness as if events were actually recurring. When, in Part II, the breeze picks up and the danger appears to be over, progression is suddenly halted by the allegorical implications of the language. The image of the Mariner's ship as "the first that ever burst/Into that silent sea" (105-6), is transgressive, akin to Satan's violation of the immaculate perfection of Eden. The narrative now becomes subservient to the self-consuming demands of an artistic ego which wishes to assert its individuality by violently transforming the world according to its own perceptions: the natural elements are sucked out of the scene so that the ship is held in an eerie suspended animation as a picture holds its contents: "Day after day, day after day,/We stuck, nor breath nor motion;/As idle as a painted ship/Upon a painted ocean" (115-118). Like the calm before the storm, the text suddenly collapses into a daemonic burst of energy:

> The very deep did rot: O Christ!
> That ever this should be!
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea. (123-26)

As the verse morally disintegrates, art subsumes the natural world, diffusing it in order to recreate it according to its own self-enclosed volitions. The sea becomes the object of the artist's pallet, burning in vivid colours which are inspired by a promethean-like fire:

> About, about, in reel and rout
> The death-fires danced at night;
> The water, like a witch's oils,
> Burnt, green, and blue and white. (127-30)

The whole process of the narrative can thus be understood in terms of the imagery of pursuit which dominates the events. The Mariner cannot escape from his own story because he is:

> Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread. (446-51)

The gloss cautiously plays down the elements of subversion that subsume the poem, interpreting the Spirit which follows the ship as: "one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet, neither departed souls nor angels; concerning whom the learned Jew, Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus, may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more". With its fabricated philosophy, the gloss attempts to contain the daemonic possession of the narrative within a facile moral schema. However, the language of the poem continually refuses to be solidified by any external influences and this becomes apparent in Part III with the approach of the phantom-ship. As it looms in the distance, it refuses to take on a definitive form: "At first it seemed a little speck,/And then it seemed a mist;/It moved and moved, and took at last/A certain shape, I wist" (149-52). It is only when the Mariner bites his arm in order to herald its approach, that the shape begins to materialise into the spectre-bark. The unnatural deed becomes another allegorical sign for original sin and, as the Mariner drinks from his own life-force, he contaminates the narrative of the poem with his own blood. This horrific action, which the marginal gloss underscores as a "dear ransom", facilitates the "absent" text's embodiment into voice and the emergence of the ghastly spectre, LIFE-IN-DEATH, is necromantically invoked in the Mariner's description of her:

> Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
> Her locks were yellow as gold:
> Her skin was as white as leprosy,
> The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
> Who thicks man's blood with cold.   (190-94)

The accentuated word '*Her*' gives the stanza a compulsive and incantatory quality, as it rises from four syllables to six, and reaches a crescendo at eight as her evil image appears before him. When LIFE-IN-DEATH plays with her mate for the Mariner's soul, her victory ensures the moral disintegration of the verse as it descends into a foreboding darkness: "The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:/At one stride comes the dark" (199-200).

The poem, therefore, always suggests the possibility of the Mariner's redemption, but it can never do anything more, for the very being of the text depends on the Mariner never being saved. The Mariner discovers that the retelling of his tale cannot release him from his desperate solipsism because poetic language will always provide an outlet for the silent text of his auditor. As the Wedding-Guest hears the story for the first time, his experiencing consciousness asserts itself within the narrative, forcing the Mariner to relive his nightmares. Poetic language is, thus, a realm where the self can most powerfully assert itself or where, in the words of Kipperman, "the enchanted mind is enthralled only with...the magic responsiveness of the world to the ego's desires"[15]. Throughout the poem the supersession of nature by the egomaniacal demands of art is dramatised by the constantly altering image of the sun. Before the Mariner's transgressive act the sun is portrayed as a natural sign, providing a wholesome and benevolent light which communicates the sympathetic powers of divine creation (25-8). However, its transformation begins after the destruction of the albatross where its creative powers undergo immediate adumbration: the sun now no longer shines brightly but is "hid in mist" (85). As the narrative progresses and the Mariner's moral renunciation intensifies, the images become more violent. In lines 111-14 the sun, in a parody of the crucifixion, bleeds as it is held right above the mast of the ship:

> All in a hot and copper sky,
> The bloody Sun, at noon,
> Right up above the mast did stand,
> No bigger than the Moon.

Nature's imprisonment in the confines of art is complete when the sun is held hostage by the skeletal outline of the phantom-ship so that "As if through a dungeon-grate he peered/With broad and burning face" (179-80). Poetic language, in this light, is elitist and heretical because it transforms divine creation into matter which is shaped by the desires of the self.

This is made explicit with the subsequent death of the crew which leaves the Mariner as the sole orchestrator of his universe:

> Alone, alone, all, all alone,
> Alone on a wide wide sea!
> And never a saint took pity on
> My soul in agony.   (232-35)

The cry, however, is double-edged. On the one hand it represents an ego that ecstatically delights in its own artistic freedom: being "alone" means being "all", which in turn means being God. On the other hand, it is a desperate recognition of the spiritual disintegration that accompanies selfhood. In his complete isolation the Mariner has, like Milton's Satan, attained the heights of autonomy. His world is his own self-created Pandemonium which attests to the usurpating powers of the poetic imagination. As Eagleton explains:

> All knowledge, as Romanticism is aware, contains a secret irony or incipient contradiction: it must at once master its object and confront it as other, acknowledge in it an autonomy it simultaneously subverts. The fantasy of total technological omnipotence conceals a nightmare: in appropriating Nature you risk eradicating it, appropriating nothing but your own acts of consciousness[16].

The Mariner, consequently, cannot achieve redemption because his world has become the product of his own imaginative construct. When he attempts to pray in order to release himself from his acute self-enthrallment, he discovers that God no longer exists and his prayers, subsequently, turn to dust:

> I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
> But or ever a prayer had gusht,
> A wicked whisper came, and made
> My heart as dry as dust.   (244-47)

Commentators often regard the Mariner's blessing of the water-snakes as the turning point in his spiritual development[17]. However, the snakes, which are euphemistically referred to as "God's creatures" in the gloss, appear to be the creations of his own imagination and his blessing of them does not release him from his incumbent nightmares. The Mariner's response to them is not one of simple or natural appreciation, but rather of aggrandisement: the snakes adorn the "rich attire" of art, exaggerating their appearances as they leave behind them "a flash of golden fire" (281). When the Mariner blesses them he is, effectively, condoning the power of his own imagination.

The Mariner's declaration that "I had drunken in my dreams,/And still my body drank" (303-4), indicates that the narrative continues to be wholly susceptible to daemonic visions and no progress, or even resolution appears imminent. The text responds by collapsing into a cataclysmic turmoil where the elements completely run amok: "The upper air burst into life!/And a hundred fire-flags sheen,/To and fro they were hurried about!/And to and fro, and in and out,/The wan stars danced between" (313-17). These lines have often been interpreted as the elements' celebratory recognition of the Mariner's redemption, but their interpretation must be dependent upon the sinister events that

follow where the crew, like the stars themselves, acquire a life of their own. The setting, as the "thick black cloud" (322) casts its shadow over the ship, and the moon replaces the sun as the narrative's central image, forebodes an atmosphere of drastic, evil intention. This is supplied by the ghastly resurrection of the dead crew who necromantically spring to life:

> They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
> Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
> It had been strange, even in a dream,
> To have seen those dead men rise. (331-34)

The zombies, who steer the boat in a horrific parody of life, have no control over their own bodies: they raise "their limbs like lifeless tools" (339) and are invigorated only by the malign Coleridgean narrative. The gloss quaintly refers to the "ghastly crew" as-"a blessed troops of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint"-attempting to incorporate their unnatural existence within some fatuous moral design. But the dead men are, on the contrary, the servants of a poetic creativity which has profanely tapped the secret of life itself. Like the STORM-BLAST, LIFE-IN-DEATH and the Polar Spirit, they are allegorical agencies of a repressed subtext which endlessly transports the Mariner back into the world of his own infernal nightmares.

In spite of the gloss's periodic announcements that "The spell begins to break", or "The curse is finally expiated", the daemonic visions persistently resurface. The cyclic nature of 'The Ancient Mariner', like Dante's depiction of Hell, amounts to an endless repetition where release from the self proves impossible. Vlasopolos understands 'The Ancient Mariner' in terms of a deviation from the traditional romantic quest which usually involves a circular structure to lend a "sense of completion", or a "visionary gain":

> Because of its customary positive value, the circular structure in *The Rime* could be taken as a sign of the Mariner's return to normality. Yet in the Romantic Quest to return to the treadmill of nature's cycle suggests the hero's lack of psychic progress. Although, like the speakers of the Greater Romantic Lyrics, the Mariner begins his visionary experience from a specified locus to which he returns, what should be his imaginative gain makes him a perpetual exile from human society instead of integrating him within it[18].

When the Mariner completes his voyage, his unholy appearance causes the Hermit to enquire "What manner of man art thou?" (577), and the pilot, as if he had been presented with a vision of the anti-Christ himself, is reduced to insanity:

> I moved my lips-the Pilot shrieked
> And fell down in a fit;
> The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
> And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,
The Devil knows how to row'.   (560-69)

The Mariner is unrecognisable to the rest of humanity and has become the victim of his own story which has refigured him, in the eyes of others, as a version of the spectre LIFE-IN-DEATH.

The Mariner, therefore, can never achieve freedom from his own text because it is the text itself which fashions his existence[19]. In seeking out another to attend his tale, the Mariner hopes to disburden himself of the "woful agony" (579) that constitutes his story. And yet this does not lead him towards his own redemption because the man he inevitably chooses is as subconsciously self-obsessed as he is. The Wedding-Guest is as compulsively attracted to the Mariner as the Mariner is to the Wedding-Guest:

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.   (586-90)

The narrative of the poem is not, therefore, an act of communication, but the transmission of an infection whereby the Mariner can relieve himself of his affliction by passing it on to another. The Mariner's freedom, however, is short-lived. When the Wedding-Guest departs "A sadder and a wiser man" (624), the Mariner has recreated himself as text to be read once again so that his narrative will always be infected by an "absent" version of himself. The chinese-box effect of 'The Ancient Mariner', whereby the poem endlessly spawns mirror images of the self, condemns the Mariner to be frozen in time and space. His lack of mental progression is indicated by his rejection, once again, of the holy sanctity of marriage: "O sweeter than the marriage-feast,/'Tis sweeter far to me,/To walk together to the kirk/With a goodly company!" (601-5). When he reaches the kirk even his "company" sunders into "each" who prays, further diminishing the sense of community.

The moral stanzas which bring the poem to its conclusion consequently appear desperately out of place. Having just announced that his experience was so lonely that "God himself/Scarce seemed there to be" (599-600), the Mariner's sudden deferential invocation of the grace of God appears incongruous:

He prayeth well, who loveth best
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.   (612-17)

The lines are knowingly bathetic for, after all, how can they correlate with a text that defends the sanctity of life, supposedly, by killing off all the crew? Critics have often pointed out how these banal and insipid moral stanzas represent an anomaly within a narrative that provides its reader with a tense and immediate range of emotions[20]. Recognising that it is the text which is responsible for his own psychic fragmentation, the Mariner purges poetic language of emotion and trope. This only emphasises that the poem's artistic gain is achieved at the expense of a redemptive, moral design. Unable to overcome the principle of selfhood within its own boundaries, 'The Ancient Mariner' fails to articulate the gloss's pedantic moral of "love and reverence to all things that God made". The true lesson of the poem is, as Coleridge intimates in his discussion on the "*supposed irritability of men of genius*", that the poetic genius is an insidious assertion of ego which can only communicate a sense of its own grandeur.

CONCLUSION

I

The fine saying of Addison is familiar to most readers,- that Babylon in ruins is not so affecting a spectacle, or so solemn, as a human mind overthrown by lunacy. How much more awful, then, and more magnificent a wreck, when a mind so regal as that of Coleridge is overthrown or threatened with overthrow, not by a visitation of Providence, but by the treachery of his own will, and the conspiracy as it were of himself against himself![1]

De Quincey's comment on Coleridge proves to be a fitting epitaph for his predecessor's poetic career. The statement represents Coleridge as his own Mariner, speculating at the internal feud between Coleridge's professed beliefs and the compulsive emergence of his own repressed anxieties. De Quincey's use of language encapsulates the morbid fascination of the horror of "The unfathomable hell within" which characterises Coleridge's own poetic diction. The poet's tortured psyche is at once both "awful" and "magnificent" in its deterioration. The absence of "Providence" heightens the regality of a mind whose poetry is the necessary articulation of the struggle between Heaven and Hell within its very own conscious will. The lines dramatise the agonising solipsism that accompanies the nature of the poetic genius and which is, ultimately, responsible for the mind's decay.

The visionary power is Coleridge's greatest, and yet deadliest asset; on the one hand it enables him to provide an acute insight into human psychology; and yet, on the other hand, it is a curse that exposes the flawed nature of a poetic creativity that finds its inspiration through an intense self-estrangement. Writing for Coleridge is, therefore, often purgatorial, relieving the speaker of his own internal distress by exorcising intense, subjective feelings outside himself into the objective and anonymous medium of language. Hence the proliferation of prefatory material that supplements the poetry, providing excuses and alibis for the nature of poetic creativity released in the verse. Here Coleridge can safely blame others or even discredit his own composition, in an effort to detach himself from the alluring secrets of the imagnation that insidiously haunt his narratives. But Coleridge's words inevitably betray him, relating him directly to the subjective desires that are released in the poetry. Often his language is compulsive and incantatory, providing an outlet for repressed fears and desires that must be released in order to purge the self of a guilt that threatens to subsume the mind in the power of its own violence. In similar circumstances to her own creator, Ellen in the 'Three Graves' is inflicted by a "sore grief of her own,/A haunting in her brain" (428-9). Unable to stifle her own words, she struggles with herself to prevent the forces within from taking over:

Then harder, till her grasp at length
Did gripe like a convulsion!
Alas!' said she, we ne'er can be
Made happy by compulsion!'

And once her both arms suddenly
Round Mary's neck she flung
And her heart panted, and she felt
The words upon her tongue.

She felt them coming, but no power
Had she the words to smother:
And with a kind of shriek she cried,
'Oh Christ! you're like your mother!   (436-47)

Ellen's inability to resist her inner distress from manifesting itself in language is paradigmatic of Coleridgean poetic practice. The emetic spontaneity of language as it acquires a life of its own is simultaneously both artistically inspired and morally destructive. A poem for Coleridge is not, as he would proclaim, the medium for the objective powers of divine inspiration to manifest itself, but a confession of the sickness of the speaker's own soul. As Basil Hallward ruminates in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, artistic creation is imaginatively brought to life, not by the object of its attention, but by the subjective nature of its interpreter:

> "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul"[2].

The imagination which ought to be benevolent in its workings in theory turns out, in practice, to be a potentially daemonic force which exposes Coleridge to the unhallowed arts. It must, as a result, be disburdened. In the Eclogue 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' Coleridgean transference is played out by the three necromantic protagonists who, having afflicted thousands of people with their diseases, fail to take personal responsibility for the crimes they have committed but rather blame an unnamed individual:

Slau. He came by stealth, and unlocked my den,
And I have drunk the blood since then
Of thence three hundred thousand men.
Both. Who bade you do't?
Slau.   The same! The same!
      Letters four do form his name.   (21-5)

89

The four lettered person, who is revealed to be Pitt in a Preface some twenty years later, may as well be the MUSE, for the poet tries to blame his words on the source that gives him inspiration. Indeed, Fire initially desists in hearing the name of her master because she recognises that it is a promethean act that will unleash powers that align poetry with a morally destructive force:

> Myself I named him once below,
> And all the souls, that damned be,
> Leaped up at once in anarchy,
> Clapped their hands and danced for glee.
> But laughed to hear Hell's burning rafters
> Unwillingly re-echo laughters!   (7-13)

Fire, in true Coleridgean style, insists that she is acting against her will, or that she has released something that she can no longer control, and yet there is a sense of delight in her visions of destruction. The compulsive desire to acquire knowledge appears to be the secret behind artistic creation.

This is made evident in the apology for the poem (published in *Sibylline Leaves* 1817) where Coleridge, remaining silent about his authorship, uses Scott as his ventriloquist in order to deputise for his own "seething imagination":

> As my friend chose to remain silent, I chose to follow his example, and Mr......[Scott] recited the poem. This he could do with the better grace, being known to have ever been not only a firm and active Anti-Jacobin and Anti-Gallican, but likewise a zealous admirer of Mr. Pitt. both as a good man and a great statesman. As a poet exclusively, he had been amused with the Eclogue; as a poet he recited it; and in a spirit which made it evident that he would have read it and repeated it with some pleasure had his own name been attached to the imaginary object or agent.
>
> After the recitation our amiable host observed that in his opinion Mr......had over-rated the merits of the poetry; but had they been tenfold greater, they could not have compensated for that malignity of heart which could alone have prompted sentiments so atrocious. I perceived that my illustrious friend became greatly distressed on my account; but fourtunately I was able to preserve fortitude and presence of mind enough to take up the subject without exciting even a suspicion how nearly and painfully interested me. (22-40)

The distinction "as a poet" is interesting. Coleridge is suggesting that the recital involves itself intimately with the process of the poetry, in spite of the "malignity of heart" that prompts its "sentiments". Scott becomes another Coleridgean alibi, momentarily allowing the true author to discard his imaginative hauntings as he becomes "greatly distressed", just as the Wedding-Guest is "of sense forlorn". Imagination, like Frankenstein's monster, must ultimately be disowned as it anarchically draws upon the darker recesses of the subconscious, destroying the poet's idealistic convictions.

Coleridge's theoretical idealisation of the poetic imagination undergoes a rigorous redefinition in the hands of his immediate literary successors. Hazlitt's account of the literary imagination in his essay on *Coriolanus* (1817) is, perhaps, the most debunking response to the blatant idealism of his predecessors. However, to conclude my survey I shall draw a brief comparison between Coleridge and De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821). Within the complex narrative of the *Confessions*, the illegitimate imaginative torments of Coleridgean poetic practice are fully realised. De Quincey revalues Coleridge's notion of the imagination as a universal and harmonic power by emphasising the vision's potential for corruption. The *Confessions* provide an evocative account of the ambivalent nature of artistic presentation in its reappraisal of the imagination as a decadent and excessive faculty.

In the *Confessions*, De Quincey sets himself up as flawed Coleridgean protagonist who is tortured by the ambivalent nature of the imagination whose visionary paradisal insights are capable of turning hellish at an instant. The *Confessions*, accordingly, show a persistent fascination with "the confluence of mighty and terrific discords with subtle concords"[3], the blending and intertwisting of "laughter and tears"[4], 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"[5]. The whole structure of the *Confessions* is based around this belief, the adventures presenting a realm of innocence and the latter section of experience, with the taking of opium causing the fall from one to the other. De Quincey conflates Heaven and Hell, creating a paradoxical world also to be found in 'Kubla Khan' of a fallen paradise. The "just, subtle, and mighty opium"[6] is also "the accursed chain"[7] that fetters him; the "Paradise of Opium-Eaters" is also the realm of "incubus and night-mare"[8]. The ambivalent nature of De Quincey's paradise is captured in the quotation, fittingly from *Paradise Lost*, which concludes the *Confessions*-"with dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms"-giving a glimpse of paradise when it is most regretted and yet most resembles Hell.

In an important passage, De Quincey creates a fascinating illusion, in his description of Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, which aptly describes the entrapment that the imagination imposes over its subjects:

> Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, Mr Coleridge, who was standing by, described to me a set of plates by that artist, called his *Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever. Some of them (I describe only from memory of Mr Coleridge's account) represented vast Gothic halls: on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, &c. &c. expressive of enormous power put forth and resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase; and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose, at least, that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher: on which again Piranesi is perceived, by this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld: and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished

stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall.-With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams[9].

The passage, as Ward points out: "is full of self-directed pathos, and the figure of Piranesi is clearly intended to reflect the figure of Coleridge, both standing finally as versions of De Quincey, trapped in his own mind between the paradisal flights of aspiring imagination, and the Gothic 'malady' of his addiction to drugs and the fleeting dreams they bring"[10]. The sense of vertigo and the impossibility of escape conspire to condemn both Coleridge and de Quincey as Mariner figures who are repeatedly rediscovered in endless reflections of themselves, condemned to the solipsism of their own labyrinthine minds.

REFERENCE NOTES

INTRODUCTION.

1 William Hazlitt, *Selected Writings*, ed. by R. Blythe, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1985), pp.284-5.

2 Peter Conrad, *The Everyman History of English Literature* (London and Melbourne: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1985), p.1.

3 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990), p.60.

4 ibid.

5 M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), p.430.

6 Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.32.

7 Abrams, op. cit., p.13.

8 Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.5.

9 Mellor, op. cit., p.vii.

10 Mellor, op. cit., p.16.

11 L.J. Swingle, *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), p.1.

12 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1974], trans. by W. Baskin, in *Modern Literary Theory: a reader*, ed. by P. Rice and P. Waugh, 2nd edn (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1992), p.14.

13 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by S. Heath in *Modern Literary Theory*, ed. by P. Rice and P. Waugh, 2nd edn (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1992), p.116.

14 Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.21.

15 McGann, op. cit., pp.1-3.

16 McGann, op. cit., p.13.

17 Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.67.

18 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.5.

19 David Simpson, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (Totowa and New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p.ix.

20 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" [1919], in *The Oxford Anthology of Literature: Modern British Literature*, ed. by Frank Kermode and John Hollander (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.508-9.

21 Eliot, op. cit., p.508.

22 Eliot, op. cit., p.511.

23 P.B. Shelley, "Defence of Poetry" [1821], in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Alasdair D.F. Macrae (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p.228.

24 Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.15.

25 On this point Paul Privateer, *Romantic Voices: identity and ideology in British poetry 1789-1850* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), argues: "If, indeed, there are discontinuities between idea and articulation, sign and intention, then when one speaks there are always at least two voices produced-the ideology that speaks through a voice, and all the voices arising from plural meanings given any one articulation" (p.88).

26 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", *Écrits: A Selection* [1977], trans. by A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd), p.2.

27 Lacan, op. cit., p.5.

28 Anne K. Mellor, "Introduction", in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne Mellor (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.5.

29 Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine", in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), observes that: "when androgyny functions as another manifestation of the male poet's urge to absorb feminine characteristics, his (or his protagonist's) female counterpart stands to risk obliteration" (p.19).

30 M.B. Ross, "Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity", in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.29.

31 Refer to U.C. Knoepflmacher, "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue", *Victorian Poetry*, 22 (1984), pp.139-159.

32 Knoepflmacher, op. cit., p.152n.

33 Marina Warner, "Monstrous Monsters", *Independent*, 27 January 1994, p.25.

34 Locke writes; "Thus we may conceive how *Words* which were by Nature so well adapted to that purpose [of human communication], come to be made use of by Men, as *the signs* of their *Ideas*; not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular articulate Sounds and certain *Ideas*, for then there would be but one language amongst all Men; but by a voluntary Imposition, whereby such a Word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an *Idea*", *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.405.

35 Jonathan Wordsworth, "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being", in *Coleridge's Imagination: essays in memory of Pete Laver*, ed. by R. Gravil, L. Newlyn and N. Roe (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.25.

36 Walter Jackson Bate, "Coleridge on the Function of Art", *Perspectives of Criticism*, xx (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p.145.

37 Laurence Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), describes the secondary imagination as: "not accepting the world as given, imagination 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create' according to its own lights and the 'conscious will'" (p.17).

38 Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p.28.

39 ibid. ·

40 Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.85.

41 Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), p.115.

42 William Walker, "Enlightened Nietzsche", *SiR*, 29 (1990), pp.42-3.

43 ibid.

44 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Das Philosophenbuch/Le Livre du Philosophe*, trans. by A.K. Marietti (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1969), p.132 (Walker translation).

45 Nietzsche, op. cit., p.140.

46 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. by J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp.222-3.

47 Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p.104.

48 Friedrich Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. by P. Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), pp.230-1.

49 Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge's Poetics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.61.

50 Gyung-Ryul Jang, in "The Imagination *Beyond* and *Within* Language: An Understanding of Coleridge's Idea of Imagination", *SiR*, 25 (1986), makes the point that "without the idea that language is the human equivalent of the Logos, it would be impossible for Coleridge to postulate the artistic creativity by which man can be placed nearer to God" (p.519).

51 M.H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric", in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.551.

52 Earl Wasserman, "The English Romantics, The Grounds of Knowledge", *SiR*, 4 (1964), p.30.

53 Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", *Blindness and Insight: essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism*, 2nd. ed., revised (1971; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p.196.

54 de Man, op. cit., pp.204-5.

55 de Man, op. cit., p.198.

56 de Man, op. cit., p.206.

57 de Man, op. cit., p.208.

58 de Man, op. cit., p.207.

CHAPTER I: POEMS OF FANCY.

1 Kathleen Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan' and Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theories", *TWC*, 22 (1991), (p.16).

2 Wheeler, op. cit., p.23.

3 David Miall, "Coleridge on Emotion: Experience into Theory", *TWC*, 22 (1991), p.38.

4 ibid.

5 Laurence Lockridge, op. cit., p.63.

6 Peter Kitson, "Coleridge, Milton and the Millennium", *TWC*, 18 (1987), (p.61).

7 Jerome McGann, "The Meaning of The Ancient Mariner", in *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods*, ed. by G.A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), p.218.

8 Conrad, op. cit., p.404.

9 John Beer, "Coleridge and Wordsworth on Reflection", *TWC*, 20 (1989), p.25.

10 Paul Magnuson, in "'The Eolian Harp' in Context", *SiR*, 24 (1985), highlights the textual difficulties that Coleridge encountered with the myrtle and jasmin image: "The parenthetical figuration of jasmin and myrtle bothered Coleridge. He left it out of the 1817 text and reinserted it later in 1830. It conspires with the emblem of the evening star to transform the natural landscape into a literary backdrop. The 'star of eve' becomes an emblem of wisdom which shines 'serenely brilliant', a phrase Coleridge borrowed from one of his earlier, unpublished poems, 'To the Evening Star', in which the lover, like the the star, inspires 'Pure joy and calm Delight'" (p.6).

11 Jack Stillinger, "Pictorialism and Matter-of-Factness in Coleridge's Poems of Somerset", *TWC*, 20 (1989), p.64.

12 ibid.

13 Conrad, op. cit., p.404.

14 Laurence Lockridge, in op. cit., writes: "In Coleridge's conversation poems, particularly 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison' (1797) and "Frost at Midnight" (1798), the poet is mentally joined to another through the willed imaging of another's experience of landscape" (p.17).

15 Rajan, op. cit., p.116.

16 Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.45.

17 These cancelled lines are cited in *Poetical Works*, ed. by E.H. Coleridge, revised (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.240n.

18 Susan Luther, "'A Different Lore': Coleridge's 'The Nightingale'", *TWC*, 20 (1989), p.93.

CHAPTER II: THE 1816 FRAGMENT VOLUME.

1 B.K.Mudge, "'Excited by Trick': Coleridge and the Gothic Imagination", *TWC*, 22 (1991), p.182.

2 Conrad Peter, op. cit., p.399.

3 Wheeler, op. cit., p.21.

4 Wheeler, op. cit., p.23.

5 Wheeler, op. cit., p.21.

6 Wheeler, op. cit., p.22.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967], trans. by G.C. Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p.145.

8 Derrida, op. cit., p.144.

9 Derrida, op. cit., p.145.

10 ibid.

11 E.M. Gold, "Shelley's Prefatory Writing", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 36 (1987), p.68.

12 Derrida, op. cit., p.145.

13 ibid.

14 W Ober, "Southey, Coleridge, and 'Kubla Khan'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 58 (1959), p.414.

15 Anne Janowitz, "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric", *SiR*, 24 (1985), p.28.

16 Conrad, op. cit., pp.407.

17 David Jasper, *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p.45.

18 Wheeler, op. cit., p.22.

19 Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.161.

20 ibid.

21 Irene Chayes, "'Kubla Khan' and the Creative Process", *SiR*, 6 (1966), pp.15-17.

22 Conrad, op. cit., p.254.

23 de Man, op. cit., p.206.

24 My italics.

25 Refer to Jane Moore, "Plagiarism with a Difference", in *Beyond Romanticism: new approaches to texts and contexts, 1780-1832*, ed. by Copley and Whale (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), for a feminist reading of 'Kubla Khan'. Moore emphasises how the distinct gender opposition in stanza iv contributes to the poem's incompletion: "he [the poet] wishes to assimilate the woman-as-muse, and to incorporate her song within himself. However, this is no easy task: the muse possesses something the poet does not; she has a language of her own, a 'symphony and song' (an *écriture feminine* perhaps?), which is other than the poet's patriarchal language, and which he cannot speak" (p.155).

26 Ross Woodman, "Nietzsche, Blake, Keats and Shelley: The Making of a Metaphorical Body", *SiR*, 29 (1990), p.115.

27 Woodman, op. cit., p.116.

28 Janowitz, op. cit., p.31.

29 Coleridge S.T., *The Critical Review* (Aug., 1794), in *A Wiltshire Parson and His Friends*, ed. by Greever (1926), p.185.

30 Greever, op. cit., pp.168-9.

31 Mario Praz, "Introductory Essay", in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. by Fairclough (London and New York: Penguin, 1968), p.20.

32 Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. by D. Wright, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1970), pp.37-41.

33 E.H. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. by E.H. Coleridge, revised (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.215.

34 Stuart Peterfreund, "The Way of Immanence, Coleridge, and the Problem of Evil", *English Literary History*, 55 (1988), p.146.

35 Peterfreund, op. cit., p.142.

CHAPTER III: 'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'.

1 Richard Holmes, op. cit., p.11.

2 Jerome McGann, op. cit., p.221..

3 ibid.

4 McGann, op. cit., p.230.

5 McGann, op. cit., p.237.

6 William Galperin, in "Coleridge and Critical Intervention", *TWC*, 22 (1991), offers a powerful critique of McGann's reading by arguing: "McGann's reading must be assessed as much in terms of what it yields - a decidedly Christian sense of the 'Rime's' meaning - as in terms of what it denies which is the daemonic consciousness or motivation that resists containment by allowing containment (even so supple a structure as that provided by the Higher Criticism) to yield to its own subversion" (p.60).

7 McGann, op. cit., p.221.

8 Conrad, op. cit., p.406.

9 Martin Wallen, "Return and Representation: The Revisions of 'The Ancient Mariner'", *TWC*, 17 (1986), p.149.

10 Peter Kitson, in "Coleridge, the French Revolution, and 'The Ancient Mariner': Collective Guilt and Individual Salvation", *Yearbook of English Studies*, 19 (1989), argues, for example, "The mariner's imagination now perceives the water snakes as beautiful and his sympathy with them leads to love of God. The curse is lifted. It is an act of grace that enables the mariner to begin the long process of restoration" (p.207).

11 M.W. Alcorn, "Coleridge's Literary Use of Narcissism", *TWC*, 16 (1985), p.13.

12 Conrad, op. cit., p.405.

13 Wallen, op. cit., p.153.

14 Galperin, op. cit., p.61.

15 Mark Kipperman, *Beyond Enchantment: German Idealism and English Romantic Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p.130.

16 Terry Eagleton, op. cit., p.74.

17 Kitson, in op. cit., argues, for example, "The mariner's imagination now perceives the water snakes as beautiful and his sympathy with them leads to love of God. The curse is lifted. It is an act of grace that enables the mariner to begin the long process of restoration" (p.207).

18 Anca Vlasopolos, "The Rime of the *Ancient Mariner* as Romantic Quest", *TWC*, 10 (1979), p.366.

19 Arden Reed, "The Mariner Rimed", in *Romanticism and Language* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1984), ed. by A. Reed, argues: "it is the tale itself that forces him to articulate it against his will. Indeed the Mariner's sole *raison d'etre* is to act as a rhymer, and he continues to 'exist' only as the by-product of a text that wills its own repetition, forcing the Mariner into a continuous action" (p.185).

20 G.S. Smith, in "A Reappraisal of the Moral Stanzas in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *SiR*, 3 (1963-4), rather succinctly makes the same point: "The lesson, which purportedly derives from an experience lived and relived in a state of supernatural possession, sounds more as if it grew out of the experience of a bird watcher" (p.44).

CONCLUSION:

1 Thomas De Quincey, op. cit., p.56.

2 Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works*, ed. by V. Holland, reprint (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1990), p.21.

3 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, ed. by A. Hayter, reprint (London and New York: Penguin, 1987), p.83.

4 De Quincey, op. cit., p.39.

5 De Quincey, op. cit., p.111.

6 De Quincey, op. cit., p.83.

7 De Quincey, op. cit., p.30.

8 De Quincey, op. cit., p.102.

9 De Quincey, op. cit., pp.105-6.

10 Geoff Ward, "The Persistence of Romanticism", in *Romantic Literature From 1790 to 1830*, ed. by Ward (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1993), p.10.