

**“To Rescue this Enlightened Age”:  
The Supernatural and Coleridge’s Divining Poetics**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation asserts that Coleridge's poems of the supernatural sprang from his own "supernatural" experiences and that they constitute one episode in his lifelong struggle to resist the growing rationalism of his age.

Part I provides an overview of contemporary literary supernaturalism as a manifestation of the kind of "enlightenment" that Coleridge opposed, a mindset that, dividing past from present and imagination from reason, effectively equated the supernatural with the imaginary.

Part II draws from works on religio-mystical experience, particularly those of Rudolph Otto, Henry Corbin, and Jess Byron Hollenback, to explore Coleridge's own intuitions and encounters. In it, I establish a "Coleridgean supernatural" that includes two disparate dimensions: a divine dimension which Coleridge valorized and named "Bright Reality," and a delusional yet quasi-material dimension which he distrusted and which I call the "spectral realm." Synthesizing the terminologies of Coleridge, Otto, Corbin, and Hollenback, I discuss these realms through the heuristics of the "divining imagination" and the "witching imagination," respectively.

Part III examines "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" in light of the witching imagination, the mind's power in certain states of consciousness to concretize thought. In these poems, supernatural agents and events are presented as simultaneously real and imaginary.



Part IV utilizes J. R. R. Tolkien's and Tzvetan Todorov's treatments of fantasy, in combination with studies of mysticism and language, to explicate Coleridge's "divining poetics." I argue that, by portraying the realities of the spectral realm in "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," Coleridge created a poetry of paradox designed to suspend discursive reasoning and provide a space for the intuitive divining imagination. Part IV closes with a treatment of "Kubla Khan," a complex text in which Coleridge articulates the relationship between the witching imagination and his divining poetics, making an ambiguous visionary experience the means to divine encounter.

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*for Joe*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Volumes of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* are indicated below by the abbreviation CC and the series volume number.

- BL            *Biographia Literaria*. Eds. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate.  
CC 7.
- CL            *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. E. L. Griggs.
- CM            *Marginalia*. Eds. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson. CC 12.
- CN            *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Kathleen Coburn.
- Friend        *The Friend*. Ed. B. E. Rooke. CC 4.
- GCW          *The Poetical Works of Goldsmith, Collins, and T. Warton*. Ed. George  
Gilfillan.
- LB            *Lyrical Ballads*. Eds. James Butler and Karen Green.
- LL            *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*. Ed. R. A. Foakes. CC 5.
- LR            *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. H. N. Coleridge.
- LS            *Lay Sermons*. Ed. R. J. White. CC 6.
- PW            *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Ernest  
Hartley Coleridge.
- SPP           *Selected Poems and Prefaces*. By William Wordsworth. Ed. Jack  
Stillinger.
- SWF          *Shorter Works and Fragments*. Eds. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J.  
Jackson. CC 11.
- TT            *Table Talk*. Ed. Carl R. Woodring. CC 14.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1797, Coleridge wrote to William Lisle Bowles concerning the current rage for Gothic fiction:

indeed I am almost weary of the Terrible, having been an hireling in the Critical Review for these last six or eight months--I have been lately reviewing the Monk, the Italian, Hubert de Sevrac & &c & &c--in all of which dungeons, and old castles, & solitary Houses by the Sea Side, & Caverns, & Woods, & extraordinary characters, & all the tribe of Horror & Mystery, have crowded on me--even to surfeiting.-- (CL 1: 318)

His reviews of these novels express much the same opinion. He opens his piece on *The Monk* with the hope, on behalf of the reading public,

that satiety will banish what good sense should have prevented; and that, wearied with fiends, incomprehensible characters, with shrieks, murders, and subterraneous dungeons, the public will learn, by the multitude of the manufacturers, with how little expense of thought or imagination this species of composition is manufactured. (SWF 1: 58)

Even more pointed is his sweeping generalization in the same essay: "Tales of enchantments and witchcraft can never be *useful*" (61). Of Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* he remarks a little more mildly, "It was not difficult to foresee that the *modern*

*romance*, even supported by the skill of the most ingenious of its votaries, would soon experience the fate of every attempt to please by what is unnatural . . .” (*SWF* 1: 79). Years later, in a critique of *Bertram* (1816), he continues his harangue, speaking disdainfully of “the ruined castles, the dungeons, the trap-doors, the skeletons, the flesh-and-blood ghosts, and the perpetual moonshine of a modern author” (*BL* 2: 211). Insisting that these conventions originated not in Germany, as many of his contemporaries believed, but in England, he declares that “we should submit to carry our own brat on our own shoulders” (212).

Considering these remarks, one may well ask why Coleridge, at the very time of writing the reviews of 1797 and 1798, would set about composing his own tales of apparitions, skeletons, demons, enchantments, and visions. One may reasonably assume that Coleridge’s contribution to the genre was a self-aware and deliberate response to it. I will argue, however, that “The Ancient Mariner,” “Christabel,” and “Kubla Khan” were much more than a response to a genre; they grew from “supernatural” experiences of his own and constituted an attempt to “rescue” his “*enlightened age*,” as he ironically called it, “from general Irreligion” (*CL* 1: 248 [1796]). The poems both depict an experiential domain with which Coleridge was familiar and instantiate a “divining poetics” whose object was the recovery of spiritual reality through a transformation of consciousness.

Such a focus on the supernatural and the divine places this study within a field largely avoided by current critical discourse. Brian Cosgrove suggests that the “general suspicion of the metaphysical and the transcendent” in criticism today reflects a fear that “an interest in those categories may serve only to distract us from what are felt to be the



more urgent programmatic requirements of various ideologies" (9). But one can, as Cosgrove urges (echoing William James), "treat the supernatural . . . as an empirically given record of human encounter with that which lies outside the familiar world: without . . . either sceptical prejudgement, or an undue willingness to succumb to the 'mystique' of the supernatural" (9). Dennis Taylor claims that the success of current discourses in "discussing the dimensions of class, gender, textuality, and historical context" has left a lacuna, and that now there is "a great critical need . . . for ways of discussing religious or spiritual dimensions in works of literature" (3). Certainly, if any writer calls for sensitivity to the role of religious experience in shaping his or her work it is Coleridge, and, because of his explicit and pervasive religious convictions and commitments, such criticism has never been entirely absent from Coleridge scholarship.

But, in contrast to other studies, the present one does not discuss Coleridge's "religious thought" or Christian theology. Rather, it takes as its subject Coleridge's reality-altering experiences. I refer to these by the collective term "supernatural" even though they consist of two (usually) distinct types, one that Coleridge considered genuine, the other delusive (when I wish to distinguish between the two, I mark the "genuine" with an uppercase "S" and the "delusive" with a lowercase "s"). I call these experiences "supernatural," but I approach them through the heuristic of mystical experience.

"Mysticism" and "mystical" are terms that suffer from a plethora of definitions. Works on mysticism frequently devote considerable space to locating and dismissing the denotations they do not accept or do not wish to discuss. Evelyn Underhill effectively presented the state of the problem in 1911:

What then do we really mean by mysticism? A word which is impartially applied to the performances of mediums and the ecstasies of the saints, to "menticulture" and sorcery, dreamy poetry and mediaeval art, to prayer and palmistry, the doctrinal excesses of Gnosticism, and the tepid speculations of the Cambridge Platonists--even, according to William James, to the higher branches of intoxication--soon ceases to have any useful meaning. . . . Hence the need of fixing, if possible, its true characteristics . . . . (72)

The meaning Underhill fixes on is "the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else." The mystic is "the person who attains to this union" (72). This union, she explains, admits of degrees attendant upon various states of consciousness. During contemplation, for instance, which is attained through the disciplined practice of recollection, the external world becomes a "blurred image" at the "fringe" of the "conscious field." During ecstasy, on the other hand, which lies beyond the mystic's control, the mystic becomes entranced and loses all consciousness of the external world in his attainment of the absolute (356-58).

More recently, Robert K. C. Forman has again pointed out the need to narrow the field for the sake of meaningful discussion. In his introduction to *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, he eliminates "visionary experiences"--hallucinations, visions, and auditions--which occur during states of "ergotropic arousal," and focuses instead on states of "trophotropic arousal" (5-7). The ergotropic are states of "hyperarousal," during which "cognitive and physiological activity are at high levels"; the trophotropic are states of "hypoarousal," and are "marked by low levels of cognitive and

physiological activity” (5-6). Forman further narrows the field, distinguishing between “extrovertive” and “introvertive” mysticism, both of which are associated with hypoarousal:

In extrovertive mysticism one preceives [*sic*] a new relationship--one of unity, blessedness, reality, or what have you--between the external world and the self. In introvertive mysticism there is no awareness of the external world *per se*; the experience is of the self itself. (8)

The latter constitutes the “pure consciousness” that is the subject of Forman’s inquiry.

Jess Byron Hollenback, in contrast, has explicitly rejected the traditional view that “visionary experiences are an inferior type of mystical consciousness” (ix). He argues that a serious consideration of visions, auditions, clairvoyance, and paranormal phenomena is necessary to a fuller understanding of classic mysticism. Both types of experience, he contends, spring from a radical transformation of consciousness induced by the process of recollection. This transformation results in the “empowerment” of the imagination (21, 94). He proposes that during this state the imagination becomes an organ of perception, creation, and even “locomotion” (21-22, 286-88). He believes that experiences of “pure consciousness” and “Ultimate Reality” are culturally conditioned, but at the same time he seeks to avoid the extremes of the “contextualist” or “constructivist” thesis.

The possibility of a universal, non-culturally conditioned mystical experience forms the central area of contention in mystical scholarship today, specifically between Forman, the foremost advocate of the “essentialist” view, and Stephen T. Katz, the chief proponent of the “constructivist/contextualist” view. Yoni Garb, in his thorough

and authoritative review of Hollenback's book in *The Journal of Religion*, claims that one of Hollenback's major contributions to the field is his "unique synthesis of the two approaches." a synthesis Garb believes is "powerful enough to become the new paradigm in the study of mysticism" (595). By locating mystical phenomena in the imagination's power to project and concretize conscious and unconscious thought, Hollenback both "goes further in accepting the ontological reality of mystical phenomena" than any previous scholar, and at the same time incorporates the role of cultural beliefs in the formation of the images themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their differences, Underhill, Forman, and Hollenback all stress the role of alterations of consciousness as central to mystical experience. Other writers, however, do not. William P. Alston says simply, "I will term 'mystical' any experience that is taken by the subject to be a direct awareness of (what is taken to be) Ultimate Reality or (what is taken to be) an object of religious worship" (80). Russell Hvolbek offers an even more general definition:

I believe that mystical experiences are related to similar and more common (if less intense and profound) existential events that also cut

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<sup>1</sup>Garb credits Hollenback with three other significant contributions: his "openness to the full array of mystical texts and phenomena" and the consequent shift in focus from "philosophical and linguistic concerns of more literate cultures to the more experiential *Sitz-in-Leben* of nonliterate societies" (594-95); his "emphasis on the role of affect" which also foregrounds the "experiential dimension" (597-98); and--the single most important innovation according to Garb--his "emphasis on the role of paranormal powers in mystical attainment" (597).

While Hollenback wins praise from Garb for his willingness to consider mystical phenomena as "both ontologically and epistemologically meaningful" (597), he receives sharp censure from Dan Merkur for his veiled occultism. Merkur asserts that while Hollenback writes of "the 'empowerment', 'exteriorization' and 'objectification' of imagination. . . . it is magic that [he] means" (103).

through time, providing us with a vision of life different from our historically based, rationally developed comprehension of reality. . . .

Originating from a participatory relationship with nature and God, a mystical experience provokes an intuitive understanding of things. (1-2).

Whether or not Coleridge can be said to have been a mystic, or even to have had mystical experiences--which is not quite the same thing--therefore depends upon the definition or theory invoked. The term "visionary" is one way of qualifying one's claims, and has been used of Coleridge in the past, notably by John Beer, Harold Bloom, and Richard Haven. Haven explains the shift from the use of "mystical" to "visionary" as turning on precisely this problem of definition (8-9). But those who use the term "visionary" tend to discuss ideas, organizing narratives, or religious world views. Beer, for instance, calls Coleridge a visionary because he asked and sought answers to the big questions concerning the "interpretation of the universe" (15). Beer's use of the term often implies a propositional "that": Coleridge had a vision *that* the universe is a harmonious whole, rather than a vision or awareness *of* that whole. Similarly, Harold Bloom speaks of the Romantics as "the visionary company" because they shared "a metaphysic, a theory of history, and much more important than either of these . . . a vision, a way of seeing, and of living" (xxiii). "A way of seeing" again contains a *that*: "they make the direct claim that poetry is prior to theology or moral philosophy, and by 'prior' they mean both more original and more intellectually powerful" (xxiii). Richard Haven's use of the term comes nearer the experiential dimension that I wish to highlight--"a reliance on the cognitive value of experience which involves something more or other than a knowledge of an objective physical

universe" (9)--but he examines Coleridge's philosophy as a symbolic expression of "his own psychological experience" (12). In contrast, I wish to emphasize the impact that experiences involving something other than "the objective physical universe" had on Coleridge's sense of reality and his posture towards his society. For this reason I choose the term "supernatural." It not only emphasizes the experiential connotation of "vision," but also encompasses both kinds of experience, divine and delusional, that Coleridge himself ascribed to the term "visionary." In the same way, the term "supernatural" allows me to explore the relationship between Coleridge's experiences, his supernatural poems, and his concern for the mindset of his age. It allows me to examine what the poems *do* rather than what they *mean*, to show how Coleridge uses delusional experiences to facilitate divine awareness.

Scholarship on mysticism, augmented by Rudolph Otto's work on "the holy," provides the lens that brings the "Coleridgean supernatural" into focus. My analysis does not proceed, however, by simply applying theories of mysticism to Coleridge's poetry. Coleridge was himself a pioneer in the study of "facts of mind" (*CL* 1: 260) and sketched a theory of visions and apparitions very like the one proposed by Hollenback in which "mystical" phenomena--from stigmata to poltergeists--are explained as concretizations effected by the empowered imagination. I by no means suggest that we should accept Hollenback's explanations of these phenomena without reservation, but I do suggest that they illumine Coleridge's own interests, speculations, and experiences. Hollenback's work on the "empowered imagination" and Henry Corbin's on the "Creative Imagination" in Sufic mysticism help to reveal Coleridge's commitment to Supernatural modes of knowing as well as his interest in altered states of

consciousness and their connection to supernatural phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge was well acquainted with the imagination as a power of perception, creation, and even revelation. He experienced an awareness of divine reality, that, as Hvolbek says, “asserts itself against the belief that all knowing is . . . the result of a rational assessment of things” (10). But he also shared with mystics (as characterized by Hollenback) a “susceptibility to certain unusual states of consciousness by means of which they come into direct contact with a domain of experience that almost always remains inaccessible to the human mind in its ordinary waking state” (33). Like Hollenback, Coleridge locates apparent supernatural visitations within these states of consciousness. Unlike Hollenback, however, he distinguishes “visionary experiences” from true vision, revealing the very prejudice that Hollenback rejects. More than once he speaks of the need to separate the genuine “intuitions” of mystics from their “delusions” (e.g. *BL* 2: 235). In a marginal note on Böhme, he reflects on two kinds of vision:

For Behmen was indeed a Visionary in two very different senses of that word. Frequently does he mistake the dreams of his own over-excited Nerves, the phantoms and witcheries from the cauldron of his own seething Fancy, for parts or symbols of a universal Process; but frequently likewise does he give incontestible proofs, that he possessed in very truth

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<sup>2</sup>Recently, Jennifer Ford has provided a much-needed treatment of Coleridge’s thinking on dreams and dream-states. She, however, situates Coleridge’s speculations within the contemporary conversation on the “medical imagination.” Her findings therefore complement but do not replace the contribution of scholars of the “mystical” imagination to my study.

"The Vision and Faculty divine!"

(*CM* 1: 558)

But Coleridge also found that these "dreams" can defy and destabilize the everyday categories of the real and the imaginary, and sometimes even the categories of delusion and revelation. "Phantoms and witcheries"; "Vision . . . divine"--both kinds of experience are involved in the composition of Coleridge's supernatural poems.

Various scholars have commented on the essentially religious thrust of Coleridge's philosophy, especially as it is expressed in the *Biographia Literaria*. Leslie Brisman argues that "the goal" of Coleridge's philosophy "is not idealism but God, not Plato but Paul, not Kant but *Emmanuel*, the Lord is with us" (128). James Engell and W. Jackson Bate describe the *Biographia* as Coleridge's effort to formulate "a philosophy less materialistic and larger-minded" than the "prevailing English one" that he felt "would end in atheism" (lxxi). Richard Holmes finds *The Statesman's Manual* and the *Biographia* linked by the same religious concerns:

In a secular age, the language and philosophy of science, and its extension into utilitarian politics, was putting a new and unparalleled pressure on the notion of the sacred. But without some concept of the sacred . . . men in society would be reduced to mechanical objects, material statistics. Far worse than this, they would begin to think of themselves as such . . . . (*Reflections* 441)

John Stuart Mill, only a generation after Coleridge, recognized that Coleridge's belief in an innate capacity for intuitive knowledge was the defining feature of his philosophy and the one that set him in opposition to the "prevailing theory" of the eighteenth century.



Mill summarizes:

Of nature, or anything whatever external to ourselves, we know, according to this theory, nothing, except the facts which present themselves to our senses, and such other facts as may, by analogy, be inferred from these. There is no knowledge *à priori*; no truths cognizable by the mind's inward light, and grounded on intuitive evidence. . . . From this doctrine, Coleridge . . . strongly dissents. (404)

The "doctrine" from which Coleridge "dissents" I will call "rationalism," for brevity's sake, using the term in the popular sense as opposed to the irrational or non-rational--or, to use Otto's expression, the "supra-rational." Otto defines "rationalism" as a "mental attitude" that insists on "clear and definite *concepts*" and does not admit the value of "feeling" or non-conceptual awareness (1-4). To put the definition in Coleridgean terms, rationalism admits only the workings of the discursive reason, or "Understanding," which Coleridge distinguishes from "intuitive Reason." Owen Barfield explains that the "vaguer connotations" of "reason" and "understanding" today are usually the exact opposite of those implied by Coleridge: "*Reason*, with its derivatives and parallels, *reasoning*, *reasonable*, *ratiocination*, often sounds to us the shallower of the two; *understanding* the deeper because more sympathetic" (94). For Coleridge, on the other hand, the understanding is the faculty that works by "processes of generalization and subsumption, of deduction and conclusion" (*BL* 1: 174). It is "the faculty of thinking and forming *judgments* on the notices furnished by the sense . . . ." (*Friend* 1: 177). Rationalism, as I use it, then, knows and describes the world--or

“reality”--through sense and understanding, and therefore includes empiricist attitudes that strict philosophical definition would exclude. Engell notes that Coleridge “deplored the meaning of ‘rational’ as scientific or empirical” (336); I use the term to indicate the set of attitudes Coleridge resisted.

Mysticism too, according to Evelyn Underhill, denies precisely this sort of rationalism: “it denies that possible knowledge is to be limited (a) to sense impressions, (b) to any process of intellection, (c) to the unfolding of the content of normal consciousness. Such diagrams of experience, it says, are hopelessly incomplete” (24). Coleridge himself claimed that “the first principle” of philosophy is “to render the mind intuitive of the *spiritual* in man (i.e. of that which lies *on the other side* of our natural consciousness)” (*BL* 1: 243). This, I believe, was the first principle of his poetics as well, and it generated the supernatural poems. Coleridge felt that his age, in its reliance on sense and understanding, was losing its power to perceive the Supernatural, was “Untenanted creation of its God” (“The Destiny of Nations” l. 35; *PW* 1: 132 ). He responded to this distancing of the Divine with a “divining poetics,” as I call it, a poetics whose object was to reawaken spiritual awareness. Coleridge’s three most famous poems are his response not only to the literature of “Horror and Mystery,” but to the distancing of the Supernatural in which that literature participated. The poems constitute one episode in his ongoing struggle to transform the consciousness of his age.

Part I, then, which is entitled “‘This Enlightened Age’: Distancing the Supernatural,” provides an overview of literary supernaturalism as a manifestation of the kind of rationalism Coleridge sought to resist. Beginning with the work of

influential antiquarian literary critics in the second half of the eighteenth century. I trace the assumptions and manoeuvres that facilitated the “manufacture” of “Horror and Mystery” in an age eager to distance itself from superstition. In their efforts to reconstruct the “barbarous” ages, antiquarians like Richard Hurd, Thomas Warton, and Thomas Percy divided the world in two.<sup>3</sup> Opposing enlightenment and the “dark ages,” reason and imagination, they participated in what Tobin Siebers calls the “Rationalist” project to “disenchant their world” by ridding it of superstition and supernaturalism (*Romantic* 25). But at the same time their mimetic reading practices created a past that could function as an alternative or “secondary” world, to use the terms of fantasy

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<sup>3</sup>The term “antiquarian” is often applied to those who studied the material remains of past cultures, but the term does not exclude the scholars of literary texts. Philip Hicks explains that antiquarianism “came of age” in the Renaissance when scholars of ancient texts began to turn to “non-literary remnants of antiquity-- inscriptions, coins, topography, ruins--” in order to “clarify and correct literary remains” (31-32). In contrast to classical or neoclassical historians, who sought to interpret ancient texts and make them productive for modern times, antiquarians worked to reconstruct the world these texts represented. They were interested in “manners, art, and trade,” subjects which the historian had traditionally considered unworthy of attention since they were “cut off from politics” and did nothing to equip one for political action (Hicks 33). The “antiquarians” of my discussion similarly turned to literary texts for information about the past, or sought to make sense of peculiar “barbarous” literature by explaining it in light of the “customs and manners” of the era that produced it. In effect, the literary text itself became an artifact, and, as Katie Trumpener remarks, the use of the term “reliques” for poetry reflects the “materialism” at the heart of antiquarian pursuits (28). The term “antiquarian” is useful as well because it avoids anachronistic disciplinary distinctions entailed in terms like “medievalist” or “folklorist.” Among literary antiquarians of the eighteenth century, the search for the origins of romance led to speculations on Arabic and Oriental tales; Chaucer and Spenser were mined for the manners of chivalry; ballad and romance were studied in tandem; popular and ancient songs were put forward in the same collections; and the Scottish Highlands were considered a repository of ancient customs and superstitions. Antiquarians were interested in “cultural alterity” and “cultural change,” as Trumpener says (xiv), and this interest cut across geographical boundaries and generic distinctions.

theory, a world where anything can happen. The divisions and displacements involved in the construction of the “pre-enlightened” world, as we may collectively call the times and cultures they dissociated from their own, fostered the exploitation of the supernatural in Gothic and romance narratives. By locating their marvels in this world, writers maintained their allegiance to reason and reality while indulging in the departure from “consensus reality” that, in Kathryn Hume’s theory, constitutes “fantasy.”<sup>4</sup> This practice allowed writers and readers to have their cake and eat it too: they could enjoy the delicious terrors of superstition while congratulating themselves on their own good sense. The dual movement of dissociation and appropriation effectively equated the supernatural with the imaginary, and the real with the material or empirically verifiable. It reproduced, in fact, the very divisions that Coleridge’s supernatural experiences undermined, and collapsed the world into the one dimension available to sense and understanding.

Part II, “‘A Visionary in Two Very Different Senses’: The Coleridgean Supernatural,” examines the experiential domains that set Coleridge at odds with this popular literature and the rationalism it embodied. Rather than offering an analysis of Coleridge’s philosophic or aesthetic theory of imagination, it seeks instead to establish his familiarity with the imagination as an organ that perceives and generates

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<sup>4</sup>In *Fantasy and Mimesis*, Hume defines “consensus reality” as “the reality we depend on for everyday action” (xi). Fantasy, then, is any “deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal” (xii). She argues that fantasy is not properly a genre at all but an impulse as important as that of mimesis: both are responses to reality and both “are involved in the creation of most literature” (xi-xii). Mimesis she defines as the “desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects”; fantasy, on the other hand, is “the desire to . . . alter reality--out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking . . .” (20).

supernatural dimensions as discussed by Corbin and Hollenback. Section A treats the spiritual dimension, the “bright Reality” to which Coleridge appeals in “The Destiny of Nations” (l. 21; *PW* 1: 132), and the faculty by which it is apprehended. Combining Coleridge’s use of Wordsworth’s expression “the vision and the faculty divine” with Otto’s notion of “divination” and Corbin’s definition of “Creative Imagination,” I name this faculty the “divining imagination.” This term stresses the experiential and noetic function of “vision” in a way that “imagination” or “reason” alone does not. Section B explores “the true witching time,” the states of consciousness in which, according to Coleridge, apparent supernatural visitations occur. In contrast to the “manufacturers” of “Horror and Mystery,” Coleridge locates encounters with ghosts, angels, demons, and other beings not in an earlier stage of mental development but in a “spectral realm,” as it were, the special state during which the mind acquires the power to give “outness” to thought and image. This power, which I call the “witching imagination,” destabilizes the boundary between the real and the imaginary that literary supernaturalism depends upon.

Part III, “Rewriting Mystery and Visitation: The Acts of the Witching Imagination,” offers a reading of “The Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel” in light of the witching imagination. In both poems Coleridge problematizes supernatural phenomena, placing them at the intersection of the real and the imaginary and undermining both those common-sense categories in the process. Section A shows how Coleridge, in “The Ancient Mariner,” explores the power of the witching imagination to penetrate reality: he locates the supernatural agents in the Mariner’s own mind, but also has them affect his external environment. This contradiction admits two possible

explanations which are by no means mutually exclusive: either the Mariner's mind is "corporific" and able to give substance to thought and image; or the projections of the witching imagination have some connection with divine reality. This second possibility is one that Coleridge struggles--not always successfully--to resist in his thinking on the supernatural. In Section B, I argue that through "Christabel" Coleridge expresses the effects of the witching imagination's power on the projector-percipient: the substantiality of nightmare diminishes the "ontological security" of the dreamer.<sup>5</sup> Coleridge inscribes this process in the prolonged encounter between Christabel and Geraldine, especially in the controversial embrace at its center. The supernatural embrace of Geraldine destabilizes the identity of Christabel and ultimately results in her displacement and "spectrification." As dream becomes reality, substance and shadow exchange places.

Part IV, "Recovering the Supernatural: Coleridge's Divining Poetics," elaborates Coleridge's employment of the witching imagination, whose visions and visitations he distrusted, in the service of the divining imagination, whose intuitions and perceptions he considered beneficial and necessary to holistic life. The term "recovery" is taken from J. R. R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories." Tolkien's notion of recovery bears significant resemblances to Coleridge's statements of poetic purpose. In

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<sup>5</sup>I have appropriated the term "ontological security" (though not the concept) from conversations with my friend and peer, Tracy Whalen. She, in turn, drew it from Anthony Giddens' *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, which I have not read. In Giddens' social theory it denotes the sense of safety and predictability that comes with routine and ritual. I use the words to denote the unquestioning conviction of substantial and material existence that Coleridge's externalized dreams eroded.

Section A. I bring together Coleridge's remarks on the function of poetry, Tolkien's "recovery," Tzvetan Todorov's "hesitation," and studies of mysticism and language to explicate Coleridge's "divining poetics." I argue that by defying the everyday categories of the real and the imaginary, Coleridge's treatment of the supernatural in "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" works to suspend the discursive faculty, so creating a space in which the divining imagination can operate. Section B follows in the long tradition of reading "Kubla Khan" as a poem "about" vision and poetic creation, but proceeds from a much more literal sense of these terms than is usually the case, a sense consistent with Coleridge's mystical orientation and with the kabbalism that informs the poem. "Kubla Khan," which I take as comprising both the preface and the poem, is yet another expression of the power of the witching imagination, but one through which Coleridge articulates the nature of poetic activity and his own divining poetics. It also captures Coleridge's own "hesitation" regarding the ambiguous status of visionary experiences hinted at in "The Ancient Mariner." For, although Coleridge wished to dismiss such visions as delusive, he felt their persuasiveness and could not decisively reject the possibility of a quasi-divining function. This hesitation complicates the status of "visionary" poetry: is such poetry a reification of delusion or of revelation? Ultimately, Coleridge's divining poetics resolves the dilemma without dissolving the ambiguity, and "Kubla Khan" embodies what it also portrays: a poetics that embraces ambiguity as the means to divine encounter.

## PART I

***“This Enlightened Age”:  
Distancing the Supernatural***



## “This Enlightened Age”: Distancing the Supernatural

The penchant for the supernatural that characterized popular literature at the end of the eighteenth century has been seen as a rebellion against the rule of reason and common sense. Devendra Varma found in Gothic novels “a quest for the numinous,” an “awestruck apprehension of Divine immanence penetrating diurnal reality” (211). Jack G. Voller has recently read Gothic and Romantic supernaturalism as a complex working-out of contemporary interests in the sublime. Voller explains that “both supernaturalism and sublimity were aesthetic systems . . . that posited an unattainable or unknowable Other and sought, in the encounter with intimations of that Other, some trace of meaning” (17). In contrast to Varma’s “numinous optimism” (34), however, he argues that the sublime was “not exclusively a positive construct,” but “has always concerned itself profoundly with absence” (10). The Gothic supernatural sublime, he suggests, “especially in its radical mode, reaches after a God who has become a *Deus absconditus*” (23).<sup>1</sup> But the supernaturalism embodied in the literature cannot be extricated from its relationship to the “Gothic” past, a relationship of divisions and

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<sup>1</sup>Voller posits two modes of the supernatural sublime: the “conventional,” exemplified by Reeve and Radcliffe, in which absence is construed as “evidence of an ungraspable transcendent presence”; and the “radical,” exemplified by Lewis, in which no such construing takes place (25-26). The radical supernatural sublime is left only with absence and “the decaying corpse in the place of God” (29-30).

displacements that pits the supernatural against reason and “reality” and virtually consigns it to the category of the imaginary.

The turn to the non-classical past, which is indicated in the very terms “Gothic” and “Romance,” became recognizable as a movement in Britain in the mid-eighteenth century. The 1760s alone saw the publication of James Macpherson’s epoch-making Ossianic poems, Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, Thomas Warton’s *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser*, Thomas Percy’s profoundly influential *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Hugh Blair’s *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, and Horace Walpole’s trend-setting Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*. These were quickly followed by Percy’s translation of Paul Henri Mallet’s *Northern Antiquities* in 1770, and Warton’s monumental four-volume work *The History of English Poetry*, published over the years 1774-81. This turn to “native” northern European antiquity provided new materials to replace classical motifs and figures. But along with the materials came a view of the past that shaped their appropriation. The antiquarians who researched and interpreted the past were motivated by an attraction to it, but this attraction contained a tension. Conditioned by the assumptions and demands of their enlightened times, these scholars and critics constructed from the literary remains they studied a world distinct and disjunct from their own culture. At the heart of this difference lay the supernatural.

Responses to the supernatural form the subject of Tobin Siebers’ *The Romantic Fantastic*. Siebers posits a “logic of superstition” by which human beings, in order to contain violence and dissolve crisis, mark and expel others as different (12). For the “Rationalists” of the Enlightenment, supernatural thought was a source of social

violence; therefore, “they condemned superstition as the scourge of humanity and worked enthusiastically to disenchant their world” (25). But the nineteenth-century Romantics, Siebers argues, regarded the Rationalist project itself as violent and exclusive, expelling faith and belief along with superstition. In reaction, as a sympathetic gesture toward the persecuted, they identified themselves with “the outcasts of Reason,” embracing a supernaturalism in which they could not truly believe (25-27). According to Siebers, both the Rationalists who rejected supernatural thought and the Romantics who rejected Rationalism enacted the logic of superstition: both groups marked the preceding group as different and sought to expel it.

But the antiquarians operated according to a different logic, which Siebers’ theory serves to illuminate.<sup>2</sup> For they valorized and preserved the “superstitious” past while simultaneously identifying with the Enlightenment. Theirs was not a logic of dissociation and expulsion, but of dissociation and appropriation: they marked the past as different, but they also welcomed that difference. The literary supernaturalism that grew from this logic was less a quest for the numinous, optimistic or otherwise, than a commodification of horror and mystery which effectively distanced the spiritual dimension.

The dissociation from the “Dark Ages” that is implicit in the term “Enlightenment” manifests itself in the opening words of Richard Hurd’s *Letters on*

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<sup>2</sup>In *The Romantic Fantastic*, Siebers applies to Romantic fiction the theory of superstition he developed in an earlier work, *The Mirror of Medusa*. However, aside from an observation or two concerning Walter Scott, he focuses entirely on the supernaturalism of nineteenth-century German, French, Russian, and American Romantics such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Guy de Maupassant, Nikolai Gogol, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe.

*Chivalry and Romance* (1762):

The ages, we call barbarous, present us with many a subject of curious speculation. What, for instance, is more remarkable than the Gothic CHIVALRY? or than the spirit of ROMANCE, which took its rise from that singular institution.

Nothing in human nature, my dear friend, is without its reasons. The modes and fashions of different times may appear, at first sight, fantastic and unaccountable. But they, who look nearly into them, discover some latent cause of their production.

“Nature once known, no prodigies remain.”

as sings our philosophical bard . . . . (1-2)

Though historicism was not new to the eighteenth century, the interest in literature of the “barbarous” as something worthy of study was still far from universal at the time of Hurd’s *Letters*. Many felt that the crude cultures of earlier times had little to offer a society so advanced and refined as their own. The editor of the vastly popular *Elegant Extracts*, Vicesimus Knox, expressed this opinion with great energy:

The antiquarian spirit which was once confined to inquiries concerning the manners, the buildings, the records, and the coins of the ages that preceded us, has now extended itself to those poetical compositions which were popular among our forefathers, but which have gradually sunk into oblivion through the decay of language and the prevalence of a correct and polished taste. . . . The popular ballad, composed by some illiterate minstrel, and which has been handed down

by tradition for several centuries. is rescued from the hands of the vulgar. to obtain a place in the collection of the man of taste. (qtd. Beers 211-12. my ellipsis).

Hurd's scientific approach to the unrefined literature--"nature once known, no prodigies remain"--offers a response to just such criticisms. The Enlightenment project of clarification and explanation could justify the study of what was still widely disparaged as ignorant, barbarous, and irrelevant: it became a phenomenon to be studied. But the self-conception of the age as reasonable and scientific also set the terms of the discussion, ensuring that the "barbarous" ages were viewed as a dark corner to be illuminated. They became an edifying foil for the present. Thomas Warton, in the opening paragraphs of *The History of English Poetry* (1774-81), implies that the value of those ages lies in what they can show us, by contrast, about ourselves:

In an age advanced to the highest degree of refinement, that species of curiosity commences, which is busied in contemplating the progress of social life, in displaying the gradations of science, and in tracing the transitions from barbarism to civility.

That these speculations should become the favourite pursuits and the fashionable topics of such a period is extremely natural. We look back on the savage condition of our ancestors with the triumph of superiority; we are pleased to mark the steps by which we have been raised from rudeness to elegance: and our reflections on this subject are accompanied with a conscious pride, arising in great measure from a tacit comparison of the infinite disproportion between the feeble efforts of

remote ages. and our present improvements in knowledge. (1: 3)

In this passage, Warton admits no attraction to “remote ages” at all except in so far as they provide grounds for self-congratulation. Even Thomas Percy expresses a similar condescension throughout the essays and notes of his much-celebrated *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Only at the bidding of his friends, he confides, has he ventured to lay before the public samples “too curious to be consigned to oblivion.” But, even so, he fears the “great simplicity” of these curiosities will make them unworthy of public attention in “the present state of improved literature” (1: xxvi).

The earlier ages to which the antiquarians contrasted their own, however, were largely drawn from the literary texts themselves. With the eighteenth-century thirst for origins and social history, poetic texts assumed new importance as historical documents. Because the earliest moments of history were not available through traditional means like histories, annals, and chronicles, scholars began to accept ancient poetry and travelers’ tales as valid sources of information--especially on “customs and manners” (Rubel 59).<sup>3</sup> Literary sources soon contributed to the reconstruction of the more recent and better-documented medieval world as well, since they were found to provide much fuller information on “customs and manners” than the dry accounts studied by earlier scholars (Johnston 146).

This reception of literary texts into historical discussion was predicated on what might be termed empiricist-mimetic reading practices: poets were believed to have

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret Mary Rubel in *Savage and Barbarian* (65-68) and Ian Haywood in *The Making of History* (35-44) both stress that the induction of early poetry into historical discourse was natural, given the contemporary theory that bards were the first historians in any society.

"copied" precisely and only what they observed. Such empiricist assumptions propelled Thomas Blackwell's groundbreaking *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735): Homer was so successful as a poet because

He took his plain natural Images from *Life*: He saw *Warriors*. and  
*Shepherds*. and *Peasants*, such as he drew . . . .

. . . [I]t may be said of *Homer*, and of every *Poet* who has wrote  
well. That *what* he felt and saw, *that* he described . . . . (34-35)

The same reading practices were extended to more recent poetry, as Warton's *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser* (1762) demonstrates. Defending the poet from Hume's criticism of his "affectations. and conceits. and fopperies of chivalry." Warton insists that these apparent follies are "nothing more than an imitation of real life" (2: 88). Spenser, like every other poet, merely copied what he saw transacted before his eyes. On these grounds, Warton asserts the usefulness of romances. However obsolete and "monstrous" they may be.

They preserve many curious historical facts. and throw considerable light  
on the nature of the feudal system. They are the pictures of antient  
usages and customs; and represent the manner, genius, and character of  
our ancestors. (2: 267-68)

As late as 1814, Sir Walter Scott declares in his "Essay on Chivalry" that he has "no hesitation in quoting the romances of chivalry as good evidence of the laws and customs of knighthood. The authors . . . invented nothing. but, cop[ied] the manners of the age in which they lived . . ." (164 note).

The antiquarians, therefore, confidently extracted from "ancient" texts exotic

worlds of revered Scalds and Bards, warfare, adventure, and worshipful knights. Epics, romances, and ballads were viewed as veridical mirrors of the "antique" world. The conviction of the accuracy of barbarous texts, however, came up against the fantastic and supernatural elements such texts contained. Invisible beings, ghosts, fairies, transformations, and enchantments might seem to have compromised the reading of poetry as historical document, but this apparent break from mimesis was absorbed into the distance between past and present. Indeed, it helped to widen the gap, since departures from common-sense reality were ascribed to an earlier stage of intellectual development. Percy locates their origins in the pervasive superstitions of "our simple ancestors" (3: 167). The Scalds, he informs us, "believed the existence of Giants and Dwarfs; they entertained opinions not unlike the more modern notion of Fairies, they were strongly possessed with the belief of spells, and enchantment . . ." (3: xi). By quoting Addison, Hurd explains the supernatural element so common in the native literature of Britain:

almost the whole substance of it owes it's [*sic*] original to the darkness and superstition of later ages [than the classical]--Our forefathers looked upon nature with more reverence and horror, before the world was enlightened by learning and philosophy, and loved to astonish themselves with the apprehensions of Witchcraft, Prodigies, Charms, and Inchantments. There was not a village in England, that had not a Ghost in it, the churchyards were all haunted, every large common had a circle of fairies belonging to it, and there was scarce a Shepherd to be met with who had not seen a spirit. (53-54)



This is not to say that belief in ghosts and witchcraft had entirely disappeared among the educated by this time. Patricia Meyer Spacks reminds us that the question of supernatural interference lingered well into the eighteenth century despite an act of George I in 1736 that declared all witchcraft "imaginary." She remarks that while "public utterances on the supernatural tended to emphasize the fact that the enlightened did not believe in such phenomena," private opinion, even among men like Addison and Johnson, was not quite so unequivocal; the weight of testimony made categorical rejection difficult (8). But Spacks also stresses that the rational members of society, like Addison and Johnson, exercised consistent skepticism in the face of any particular account of supernatural activity. Addison, for example, stopped short of dismissing witchcraft as impossible, but remained deeply "suspicious" *because* the "deepest believers" were the "ignorant and credulous" (9). Theoretical suspension of judgment does not preclude practical incredulity. Actual accounts of ghosts and enchantments could be dismissed as "the exclusive property of the ignorant and superstitious" (Spacks 29). By implication, belief in such accounts might serve as a yardstick of enlightenment.

Siebers contends that the Rationalists of the Enlightenment dissociated themselves from the supernatural orientation of earlier centuries and labeled it "superstition" (*Romantic* 21, 25-26). Here we see the process of division at work among men of letters. According to their schema, where the credulous and superstitious mind is absent, the marvelous will not appear. Paul Mallet, whose *Northern Antiquities* (1755) was translated by Percy in 1770, places supernatural events firmly in the benighted past: "the age of the greatest ignorance . . . is precisely that which has been

most fruitful of oracles, divinations, prophetic dreams, apparitions, and other prodigies of that kind" (119). He also suggests a reason: "The great objects of nature strike more forcibly on rude imaginations" (237). Hugh Blair concurs, articulating in *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1765) the widespread belief that enlightenment is inversely proportional to imagination:

As the world advances, the understanding gains ground upon the imagination; the understanding is more exercised; the imagination, less. Fewer objects occur that are new or surprising. Men apply themselves to the causes of things; they correct and refine one another; they subdue or disguise their passions . . . . (3)

"Imagination" in this discourse seems to fall between the categories of "fancy" and "imagination" as Engell and Bate delineate the usages before Coleridge's famous definition. "Fancy" was derived from the Greek *phantasia* and traditionally connoted the free, creative play of mind. It was therefore the "higher power." The Latin *imaginatio*, on the other hand, stressed "the concrete and sensory," and was considered the "inferior power." But fancy came to be "associated with chimeras, unrealistic fantasies" and fell under the suspicion of seventeenth-century rationalists (xcvii). Therefore, when new ideas of perception and creativity began to evolve in the eighteenth century, as Engell elaborates in *The Creative Imagination*, writers appropriated the term "imagination" to represent the more "plastic" power, and fancy was finally demoted to the "aggregative and associative power," as Coleridge called it, completing the reversal that had begun decades before (173-74).

J. R. R. Tolkien sought to reverse the terms again. In a veiled dispute with

Coleridge in his essay "On Fairy-Stories." Tolkien writes.

The human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present. The faculty of conceiving the images is (or was) naturally called Imagination. But in recent times, in technical not normal language, Imagination has often been held to be something higher than mere image-making, ascribed to the operations of Fancy (a reduced and depreciatory form of the older word Fantasy) . . . . (43)

Because of fancy's degradation, Tolkien requires a different word for the "Sub-creative Art" that is free to depart from "the domination of observed 'fact.'" He settles on "Fantasy" (44). In so doing, he harks back to the Greek term that dominated the distinction before the eighteenth century, but emphatically distances himself from the rationalist distrust of fantasy--the very distrust (indeed, disdain) that called forth his defense of fairy-stories in the first place. Tolkien insists that fantasy is a natural and healthy human ability that "does not destroy or even insult Reason" or weaken the desire for "scientific verity" (50).

For antiquarian literary critics discussing the supernatural, "imagination" means neither the free play of the mind (or "Sub-creative Art") nor the image-making power that deals in concrete, sensory objects. Rather, it is the faculty that translates into images or figures passionate, unreflective responses to nature. Blackwell links strong emotion and ignorance with metaphorical language (38-43). Blair defines poetry as "the language of passion, or of imagination"; it is therefore the special province of "barbarous nations" who express themselves in "bold figures of speech" (*Lectures* 85, 89). Working in the absence of reason and knowledge, which generate clear and

distinct ideas. imagination generated the marvelous and emotive poetry of the barbarous ages. Mallet observes.

The most affecting and most striking passages in the ancient northern poetry, were such as now seem to us the most whimsical, unintelligible, and overstrained; so different are our modes of thinking from theirs. We can admit of nothing but what is accurate and perspicuous. They only required bold and astonishing images, which appear to us hyperbolical and gigantic. (238)

Thomas Warton says simply, "Tales are the learning of a rude age" (*History* 1: 238). Although, in the darkness before enlightenment, the imagination did indeed depart from reality, it did so not in a free and deliberate act of sub-creation, but in an effort to make sense of a world felt but not yet understood.

The universal darkness of these times, according to Warton, also explains the prodigies belonging to Catholicism:

The genius of romance and of popery was the same, and both were strengthened by the reciprocation of a similar spirit of credulity. The dragons and the castles of the one were of a piece with the visions and pretended miracles of the other. (*History* 1: 248)

The supernatural and the fantastic spring from the same source. Barbarism, darkness, ignorance, credulity, superstition, and early religion--including Catholicism--become practically interchangeable terms. All are equally applicable to the ages preceding the sixteenth century, at which time the "human mind" managed at last to "break the bonds of barbarism" (Warton *History* 3: 323).

Writers like Spenser, however, who lived after the fall of barbarism, presented a special problem. Warton addresses the question directly: why did Spenser, who presumably should have known better, still write in “the romantic manner” of “unnatural events, the machinations of imaginary beings, and adventures entertaining only as they were improbable”? Why did he use fantastic elements that strike enlightened sensibilities as simply ridiculous (Warton *Observations* 1: 1)? The solution characteristically opposes imagination to reason while maintaining that literature is a copy of reality. For, as Warton explains, although the bonds of barbarism had been broken by Spenser’s time, a few threads still remained, and Spenser, like every writer, was the product of his time. The romance was still the most eagerly sought after form of literature, and the one with which Spenser himself was most familiar (*Observations* 1: 2-4; 2: 84, 88). Spenser’s was a time of transition when the classics, romances, and Italian novels were read side by side. It was a time when

the Reformation had not yet . . . disenchanted all the strongholds of superstition. . . . Reason suffered a few demons still to linger, which she chose to retain in her service under the guidance of poetry. . . .

. . . We were now arrived at that point, when the national credulity, chastened by reason, had produced a sort of civilized superstition, and left a set of traditions, fanciful enough for poetic decoration, and yet not too violent and chimerical for common sense.

(*History* 4: 359-60)

While the romantic machinery was not necessarily granted simple credence any longer, in other words, it was not yet dismissed out of hand. One way to reconcile its

absurdities with good sense was to allegorize or moralize it, as Spenser did (Warton *History* 1: 304-305). Hurd makes the same observation, explaining that “under this form the tales of faery kept their ground, and even made their fortune at court”; reason, however, eventually “drove them off” altogether, and fancy had to subordinate itself to truth or be laughed out of “reasonable company” (119).

Related to this concession of relative good sense to “fanciful” writers in transitional times was another clause in the empiricist-mimetic theory that provided a degree of freedom for fully “enlightened” writers. It turned upon a distinction between the author and his original audience, or between him and the people he portrayed: a writer might himself be capable of discriminating between the real and the imaginary while depicting the absurdities of those who were not. Hurd stipulates that if the poet’s “fancies have, or may be supposed to have, a countenance from the current superstitions of the age, in which he writes,” he can do without the belief of his reader. The reader, in fact, is free to be “as sceptical and as incredulous, as he pleases” (90). It is no wonder that Coleridge later phrased his famous formulation negatively, as “a suspension of *disbelief*.” Tolkien took this to mean a “stifling” of disbelief, a form of condescension or “make-believe” (Tolkien 37). But Coleridge was responding to a stubborn rationalist orientation that demanded correspondence to reality even in creative art.<sup>4</sup> This orientation required that a writer legitimize departures from common-sense reality by portraying them as someone else’s. As Collins so succinctly put it in his “Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland” (1749), “scenes like

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<sup>4</sup>The relationship between Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief” and Tolkien’s “Secondary Belief” will be addressed in Part IV (A), “The Place of Paradox.”

these.” while “daring to depart / From sober truth, are still to nature true” (ll. 189-90; *GCW* 131).

These explanations of the supernatural and the fantastic in literature reinforced the division of the world into two contrasting halves. Empiricist-mimetic assumptions helped to make the other half an otherworld, an alternative to the world of enlightenment. And the text became a vehicle to take the reader there. Hence, Blair’s praise of Ossian: “whilst reading him, we are transported as into a new region, and dwell among his objects as if they were all real” (*Dissertation* 85). Fiona J. Stafford describes the world of Ossian as “remote and mysterious, haunted by ghosts and surrounded by mists and darkness. It was the complete antithesis of the Enlightenment” (174). It was also, of course, largely the creation of James Macpherson and, therefore, perhaps, the first fully formed and sustained “secondary world” in the history of modern literature. Tolkien too, after all, formed his Middle Earth from (or for) the ancient literatures he studied. An important difference between the two authors, however, is that one put his work forward as translation, the other as creation. But the world Macpherson forged was really only a logical, if extreme, extension of the antiquarian project. Indeed, Ian Haywood argues that the “general reverence for literature that was known or believed to have . . . a groundwork in history” impelled Macpherson to present his work as ancient (47). Blair’s defense of the poems’ authenticity exemplifies the irony at the heart of the Ossianic phenomenon and of the empiricist reading practices that made it possible:

the foundation which those facts and characters had in truth, and the share which the poet himself had in the transactions which he records,

must be considered as no small advantage to his work. For truth makes an impression on the mind far beyond any fiction; and no man, let his imagination be ever so strong, relates any events so feelingly as those in which he has been interested; paints any scene so naturally as one which he has seen; or draws any characters in such strong colours as those which he has personally known. (50)

The "truths" of Ossian, however, were imaginatively created and reconstructed--not copied from experience--by a poet firmly located in the eighteenth century. In effect, Macpherson and other more ingenuous scholars formed their own fantastic worlds of ghosts and heroes, dragons and knights from their study of the past.

In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien defines fantasy as imagination freed from fact and expressed through art. Successful fantasy creates a secondary world that commands secondary belief. That is, it creates an imaginary world that possesses the "inner consistency of reality" so that the reader believes in it while reading it (43-45). Built not on possibility but desirability, secondary worlds contain many beings and objects that the "Primary World," or "Reality," does not. For instance, one may feel the attraction of dragons without believing that they exist in the "real" world (39-40)--undoubtedly, their desirability depends on their *not* existing in the real world. Secondary worlds are alternative worlds that offer a temporary and valid escape from the less than perfect world of everyday life (54).

For the antiquarians, however, the past itself became a secondary world. Having helped to divide the world in two, they found alluring the very things they had left behind. Despite their self-congratulatory tone, they felt ambivalent about progress.



Richard Hurd muses wistfully on the decline of fairy tales and the advent of reasonable and realistic literature:

What we have gotten by this revolution, you will say, is a great deal of good sense. What we have lost, is a world of fine fabling . . . .  
(120)

Lost, too, was the capacity for pure passion and enthralling imagination. As Eva T. H. Brann says, life now suffered from the “de-profundization” that was the legacy of the Enlightenment (2), a remark that echoes Coleridge’s complaint in 1796 that in his “*enlightened age* . . . . [t]he stream of Knowledge has diffused itself into shallows” (*CL* 1: 248). If mystery and terror really are only the by-products of ignorance, if imagination is the inverse of reason and tales and romances its language, nothing remains for the inhabitants of the sun-bleached side of history but the relentless grind of reflecting, critiquing, classifying, and discoursing. Mallet complains that in his age poetry can be “nothing more than reasoning in rhyme, addressed to the understanding, but very little to the heart” (Mallet 238).

But having accepted the oppositions of imagination and reason, passion and refinement, these men found they could mitigate their loss by contact with that distant other world. The amateur antiquarian Horace Walpole confesses to his friend George Montagu:

Visions you know have always been my pasture; and so far from growing old enough to quarrel with their emptiness, I almost think there is no wisdom comparable to that of exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams. Old castles, old pictures, old histories, and the babble of

old people. make one live back into the centuries. that cannot disappoint one. (*Letters* 4: 459)

Walpole's alternative to reality was his vision of the past. Strawberry Hill provided a "secondary" Gothic world he could live in bodily. Brann reflects, "enlightened life works up a hunger for the missing shadow" (14). Although referring to the craze for Gothic novels at the end of the century--the genre inaugurated by Walpole himself--her words are equally applicable to more rigorous antiquarians as well. Warton, in his poem "The Pleasures of Melancholy," hungers for "religious horror" and such "mystic visions . . . as Spenser saw" (ll. 41, 63; *GCW* 179, 181). He longs to "forget / The solemn dullness of the tedious world, / While Fancy grasps the visionary fair" (ll. 176-78; *GCW* 183). The experiences that mark the past as different awaken desire in him. The world he has helped to construct has become the site of the "missing shadow." Even in his *Observations on the Fairy Queen* he admits that the furtherance of knowledge is not his only object; rather, he writes, "One looks back with a romantic pleasure on the arts and fashions of an age, which, 'employ'd the power of fairy hands'" (2: 234). Chaucer's "old manners, his romantic arguments, his wildness of painting, his simplicity and antiquity of expression, transport us into some fairy region" (1: 197).

"Fairy hands" seems to stand by metonymy for the "pre-enlightened" imagination, "fairy land" for the past itself. The creations of the past, whether art, religion, or philosophy, were the products of an imagination that could conceive of and believe in fairies and enchantments, mystic visions and miracles, could be terrified by ghosts and spirits. In this way, as the antiquarians saw it, the people of "barbarous"

ages did live in fairyland. So Richard Hurd as tour guide could reverently proclaim,

"We are upon enchanted ground, my friend; and you are to think yourself well used that I detain you no longer in this fearful circle" (54). If for Tolkien a "fairy-story" provided an imaginary world that contained the *desiderata* reality lacked, for the antiquarians it provided transport into the enchanted world of pre-enlightenment. Through the magic mirror of the text, the antiquarians could appropriate the world they had marked as different.

This dual movement of dissociation and appropriation provided the mechanism necessary for the supernatural fantastic of the later eighteenth century. The trend gained such momentum that Thomas Love Peacock was still lamenting it in "The Four Ages of Poetry" in 1820:

barbaric manners and supernatural interventions are essential to poetry. Either in the scene, or in the time, or in both, it must be remote from our ordinary perceptions. While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. (15-16)

But the supernatural was placed in a world "remote from our ordinary perceptions" precisely because it was alien to enlightenment. Extravagant fancies, as Hurd warned, will not fare well if they have no basis in actual belief. Because readers have difficulty entering into circumstances unconnected with the reality they observe, writers are more

successful “painting . . . what they believe themselves, *or at least observe in others a facility of believing*” (101, emphasis mine). Since enlightened readers could not, by definition, believe in portents and magic, the writer was well-advised to transport them to the time when people did believe. The “barbarous” ages, therefore, quite naturally became the location for the supernatural in fiction of the eighteenth century. Spacks notes that the strategy of displacement was already in use during the first half of the century. In pastoral poetry, for instance, superstitions were routinely attributed to unsophisticated “swains,” and writers were thus able to enliven their work with supernatural material (31-2). But with the intervening work on antique literatures and traditions in the middle of the century, writers now capitalized on the potential for entertainment that lay in re-creating the world of superstition more fully.

Mimetic re-creation legitimizes the supernatural in the first Gothic novel, Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Walpole originally presented his novel as the translation of a medieval Italian manuscript, a pretense that reflects not only the widespread reverence for history that Haywood links with the Ossianic forgeries, but also the view that horror and mystery are features of the benighted past. In the preface to the first edition, Walpole defends the “author’s” use of the supernatural by appealing to his times:

Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them. (4)

Walpole’s was not a serious attempt at forgery, and he revealed his authorship with the

next edition of the novel. But his desire to represent the past was as genuine as his desire to entertain. He wrote to the Reverend Cole. "if I have amused you. by retracing with any fidelity the manners of ancient days. I am content" (*Letters* 4: 328). Those ancient days are the times of the Crusades. which Walpole in his preface calls "the darkest ages of christianity" (3). His very subtitle. "A Gothic Story." signals the displacement of his apparitions and portents to barbarous times and validates their presence in his tale.

Similarly. Clara Reeve. although she minimizes her supernatural machinery by comparison with Walpole's. nevertheless also signals its displacement to the past by calling her *Old English Baron* a "Gothic Story" (1778). She informs the reader at its very opening that the story is set "in the minority of Henry the Sixth. King of England" (the early fifteenth century) (7). Like Walpole. she includes a preface that presents her novel as a "picture of Gothic times and manners" (3). By placing their novels in superstitious times. both Walpole and Reeve are able to employ prodigies without insulting their readers' good sense. But in doing so they reinforce the division between the earlier ages and their own enlightened era. relegating experiences of horror and mystery firmly to the former and implicitly opposing imagination and reason.

The same principles of division and mimetic displacement authorize the fantastic in Scott's "historical" romance *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). Scott's prefatory note clearly distances the past from the present:

THE Poem. now offered to the Public. is intended to illustrate the  
customs and manners. which anciently prevailed on the Borders of  
England and Scotland. . . . As the description of scenery and manners

was more the object of the Author, than a combined and regular narrative. the plan of the ancient Metrical Romance was adopted, which allows greater latitude, in this respect, than would be consistent with the dignity of a regular Poem. . . . The machinery also, adopted from popular belief, would have seemed puerile in a Poem, which did not partake of the rudeness of the old Ballad, or Metrical Romance.

For these reasons, the Poem was put into the mouth of an ancient Minstrel, the last of the race . . . .

Scott describes his work not as free invention or "sub-creation," or as a deliberate departure from consensus reality, but as a re-creation of the "ancient" world for modern readers. Even the ballad form is intended to reconcile the reader to enchantments and shape-shifters--the "machinery" to which Scott refers--by evoking their socio-historical context.<sup>5</sup>

The extensive annotations that accompany Scott's narrative assist and underscore his re-creative project. Viewed from our standpoint in the history of reading, these notes

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<sup>5</sup>Hume, whose definition of fantasy as "any departure from consensus reality" informs my treatment of literary supernaturalism, is well aware that "reality" and "representation" are contested terms. She concedes that Robert Scholes is correct in theory when he says, "All writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording. Only constructing." The antiquarian construction of the past is a case in point. But Hume also insists that

In practice . . . we know it to be quite possible to recognize an imitative and realistic intention in narratives. . . . Hence, I continue to use the traditional terms, mimesis and fantasy, and as *impulses* behind the creation of literature, the terms are accurate and usable . . . . (24-25)

The peculiarity of the "antiquarian fantastic," as we might call the literature of displaced supernaturalism, is that it engages in departures from common-sense reality in the name of mimesis.

interfere with "secondary belief," or Coleridge's roughly equivalent "suspension of disbelief," by pulling the reader out of the fictional narrative. Addressed by a distinctly reality-oriented author, readers are unable to escape into what should be, according to Tolkien, a self-contained imaginative world. Scott speaks from the primary world, distancing his magical elements by revealing their origins in unsophisticated thought: "Padua was long supposed, *by the Scottish peasants*, to be the principal school of necromancy" (228 n.x, my emphasis). He grounds his apparent flights of fancy in real beliefs: "the Scottish vulgar . . . believe in the existence of an intermediate class of spirits residing in the air" (229 n.xii). Popular belief, especially in remote regions, serves as a repository of ancient superstition. Notes like the one on "The wonderful Michael Scott" remove the reader not only from the marvels of the text, but distance him or her from the pre-enlightened mind, past *and* present:<sup>6</sup>

Sir Michael Scott of Balwearie flourished during the 13th century  
. . . . [H]e appears to have been addicted to the abstruse studies of  
judicial astrology, alchemy, physiognomy and chiromancy. Hence he  
passed among his contemporaries for a skilful magician. . . .

A personage, thus spoken of by biographers and historians [i.e. as  
a magician], loses little of his mystical frame in vulgar tradition.

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<sup>6</sup>A state of pre-enlightenment was not necessarily limited to the past. One could step back in time by stepping into remote or rustic society. The common people of Scotland, particularly the Highlands, constituted one such culture. Hence Collins' lines in the "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands":

'Tis Fancy's Land to which thou sett'st thy Feet;  
Where still, 'tis said, the fairy people meet.  
Beneath each birken Shade, on mead or hill. (ll. 19-21; GCW 126)

Accordingly, the memory of Sir Michael Scott survives in many a legend; and in the south of Scotland, any work of great labour and antiquity, is ascribed, either to the agency of *Auld Michael*, of Sir William Wallace, or of the devil. (252 n.xi).

Scott's scholarly apparatus acts as a "disfiguring frame," as Tolkien puts it. Like a story that uses "the machinery of Dream, the dreaming of actual human sleep, to explain the apparent occurrences of its marvels," it explodes the magic it presents. According to Tolkien, the fairy-story "cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which [the marvels] occur is a figment or illusion" (19). Coleridge himself argues a similar line in the *Biographia* when he complains that continual references to "facts" of history prevent the "*negative* faith" that fiction ought to elicit, faith "which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment" (2: 134). William Empson and David Pirie note, "Coleridge claimed that Walter Scott's handling of superstition put the writer in a damagingly superior position to his story: 'that discrepancy [*sic*] between the Narrator and the Narrative chills and deadens the Sympathy'" (215).

But Scott never pretended to invite belief or faith--whether "secondary" or "negative." Rather, as Coleridge recognizes in his remarks on *The Lady of the Lake*, historical romances were designed to carry the reader into the past. In a letter to Wordsworth in 1810, Coleridge comments on this function in unflattering terms:

--Observe, this a poem of the dark Ages, & admire with me the felicity of aiding the imagination in it's flight into the Ages past, & oblivion of



the present by--God save the King! & other savory Descants. (CL 3: 294)

Scott's historical romances serve as a bridge to a world of pre-enlightenment, and his annotations are its supports--proofs of its reliability. Consequently, readers are able to enjoy tales of enchantment without forsaking their own commitment to reality. They are asked to believe only that humankind was, and in some remote regions still is, credulous enough to believe that such wonders were possible.

By inscribing supernatural events as phenomena of pre-enlightened minds, *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* reaffirm the rationalist project to "disenchant their world" (Siebers *Romantic* 25) while making superstition available for consumption. Even Ann Radcliffe, although she employs a different strategy of displacement, exhibits the same logic of dissociation and appropriation. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) are both set on this side of the fall of barbarism, the former beginning in the year 1584 and the latter taking place in the second half of the eighteenth century, almost contemporaneous with its composition. In addition to modernizing her settings, Radcliffe "rationalizes" her supernatural events, providing natural explanations for them in the end. Her novels hardly seem to exemplify literary supernaturalism at all. Robert F. Geary argues that they are as much "domestic, prudential" stories in the manner of Richardson as they are "Gothic" (43). "Gothic terrors," he says, "must therefore be reduced to creating stimulating occasions for the growth of a disciplined sensibility. Terror, imaginary or real, is to be, in our terms, a 'learning experience'" (45). Radcliffe has no need of supernatural intrusions that turn out to be "real," and events that have natural

explanations do not require displacement to the ages of universal darkness.

Even so, Radcliffe participates in the same division and dissociation executed by Walpole, Reeve, and Scott. She attributes her characters' willingness to interpret unexplained phenomena in supernatural terms to their over-imaginative and superstitious minds (and both qualities, moreover, to Catholicism; as in the work of Warton. Catholicism and credulity here go hand in hand). For Radcliffe, imagination unrestrained by reason is the breeding ground of superstition, as one particular exchange between Schedoni and Vivaldi in *The Italian* clearly shows. Schedoni, remarking that Vivaldi is especially susceptible to superstition, recalls a conversation they once had on the subject of "invisible spirits":

"The opinions you avowed were rational," said Schedoni, "but the ardour of your imagination was apparent, and what ardent imagination ever was contented to trust to plain reasoning, or to the evidence of the senses? It may not willingly confine itself to the dull truths of this earth, but, eager to expand its faculties, to fill its capacity, and to experience its own peculiar delights, soars after new wonders into a world of its own!"

Vivaldi blushed at this reproof, now conscious of its justness; and was surprised that Schedoni should so well have understood the nature of his mind . . . . (397-98)

Similarly, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe writes of Emily's fears of supernatural intrusions: "the terrors of superstition . . . pervaded her mind" because "her imagination was inflamed, while her judgment was not enlightened" (371). In

these novels, as in the work of the antiquarians, an imagination that resorts to supernatural explanations for strange but natural phenomena is consistently portrayed as something to be overcome.

In this sense, the Gothic and romance narratives of the eighteenth century are “anti-Gothic”: they reinforce the notion that barbarity, darkness, imagination, and superstition are characteristics of the past and inversely proportional to rationality. They affirm the view that reality is correlated to reason and obscured by imagination. Engell and Bate remark that the opposition of faculties, for instance, judgment and imagination, “had become far less common in the later eighteenth century.” Yet, as they also note, Coleridge objected to it in 1802 and was still objecting to it in 1815 when he wrote the *Biographia* (BL 2: 26 n3). Clearly, this opposition remained alive enough to cause him concern, and one arena in which it still held sway was the literature of horror and mystery.

Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796) is no exception. The first page of the novel, if it does not set the time, certainly establishes superstitious (read “Catholic”) society as the context. As Coleridge notes, Lewis “takes frequent occasion, indeed, to manifest his sovereign contempt for the latter, both in his own person, and (most incongruously) in that of his principal characters . . .” (SWF 1: 61). Lorenzo’s good sense recognizes the “gross absurdity” of the monks’ “miracles, wonders, and supposititious reliques. He blushed to see his countrymen the dupes of deceptions so ridiculous, and only wished for an opportunity to free them from their monkish fetters” (3: 81). Lorenzo’s refusal to believe in ghosts is fully justified by the end of the novel, but Lewis is not as consistent as Radcliffe. Demonic incarnations are never explained away; rather, they

are exploited for every salacious detail and shudder they can generate. Magic is never proved fraudulent, but is painstakingly staged for sensational effect.

Geary explains these contradictions by focusing on Lewis' treatment of providence. In this novel, the "providential context" that governed, whether successfully or not, the earlier gothic novels "dissolves entirely, exposing a most primitive form of the numinous--in Otto's terms, 'daemonic dread.'" In *The Monk*, God has disappeared, leaving only Satan. Geary continues, "Enlightenment rationalism, having eroded the Christian providentialism of an earlier consensus, issues not in a world of light, good sense, and prudent self-interest but in a primitive world of numinous fury, demonic terrors both from without and within" (63). But Geary grants the novel too much seriousness and too much dignity. For one thing, his explanation does not accord well with the conventional Protestant piety that emerges on more than one occasion, most notably when Ambrosio reflects on his course of action in light of his coming deserts: his knowledge and reason tell him only too clearly that there is a God, but this knowledge now adds to his terror (Lewis 3: 183-4). For another, Geary fails to note that all the evils spring from deep faults attributed to traditional Catholicism. If anything, *The Monk* is a vicious attack on asceticism as a nurturing ground for pride, hypocrisy, and aggravated lasciviousness, what Victor Sage calls an "almost ritual element of anti-Catholic pamphleteering" that was designed to help sell the book (xiv).

But the anti-Catholic element is more than a device intended to attract an audience. It functions as the pre-enlightened context common to literary supernaturalism. Lewis and his readers can enjoy both sadistic fantasies and the terrors

of the demonic while laying them at the door of a corrupt religion. What Lewis says of Ambrosio serves as an analogy for his own practice; just as Ambrosio assigns his guilt in employing demons to Matilda, his temptress (2: 180-81), so Lewis attributes his own use of demons and magic to Ambrosio. "Enlightenment rationalism" has allowed the stigmatizing of Catholicism as irrational, superstitious, and unnatural to such an extent that Lewis can indulge his own irrationalities within it, and emerge congratulating himself on his piety and good sense.

This strategy of division and displacement gives the writer license to caricature and commodify the supernatural for its entertainment value. Distanced to the past, or to an immature, unrefined stage of mental development, the terrors of superstition have no purchase on the world of the reader. They can be used to generate sensational effects and vicarious fear that distance renders safe and pleasurable. According to Coleridge, Lewis proceeded on the assumption that "the order of nature may be changed whenever the author's purposes demand it," and this purpose was to titillate (*SWF* 1: 59). Worse still, the violence that attends and results from demonic interference in his characters' lives removes the novel, in Coleridge's opinion, from the category of pleasurable (and therefore beneficial) romance:

The sufferings which he describes are so frightful and intolerable, that we break with abruptness from the delusion, and indignantly suspect the man of a species of brutality, who could find a pleasure in wantonly imagining them . . . . (59)

Coleridge suggests that Lewis shows his appetite for sensationalism in his complete disregard for the emotional and moral consistency of his characters, chiefly Ambrosio

(60). as well as in the "libidinous minuteness" with which he describes both Ambrosio's "temptations" and the physical horrors that fill the novel (61). Coleridge writes.

The merit of a novelist is in proportion (not simply to the effect. but) to the *pleasurable* effect which he produces. Situations of torment. and images of naked horror. are easily conceived; and a writer in whose works they abound. deserves our gratitude almost equally with him who should drag us by way of sport through a military hospital, or force us to sit at the dissecting-table of a natural philosopher. (59)

Coleridge has recognized in Lewis' work the "frenzy of the visible" that. according to Rebecca E. Martin. establishes the Gothic as a "proto-cinematic" genre (82).<sup>7</sup> The Gothic, she explains. operates on

the visual and the connection of the act of seeing to the reader/spectator's desire. The Gothic provokes an "unsuspected visual pleasure" in the reader with images that promise to show and promise to display the "truth" of whatever the reader wants to see--the expression on the face of a man as he murders his daughter; the face of death on a corpse; indeed. the face of death itself as a cowed skeleton slowly turns toward the viewer. (83)

Martin argues that this preoccupation with the visual produces repetition--recurring and detailed scenes of terror--and is subject to the law of diminishing returns. The more one sees. the more one wishes to see. and each repetition promises something greater still to

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<sup>7</sup>Martin's analysis of the Gothic draws on the film theory developed by Linda Williams in her work on pornography. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: U of California P. 1989).

come (82-83). But the Gothic can never deliver that final satisfying and promised "something." Coleridge, too, perceived that the Gothic offered no satisfaction. Martin cites his criticism of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as an example of the many readers who complained about the genre's shortcomings: "curiosity is raised oftener than it is gratified; or rather, it is raised so high that no adequate gratification can be given it" (Martin 86 n2). Even more apropos is a passage Martin does not quote. Speaking in general terms of the inevitable failure of "the modern romance," Coleridge writes in his review of *The Italian*,

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 natural complexion, it would degenerate into repetition, and would disappoint curiosity. So many cries "that the wolf is coming," must at last lose their effect. (*SWF* 1: 79).

Martin's treatment helps reveal the irony that the Gothic, a genre which seems to explore horror and mystery and can therefore easily be taken as an expression of religious experience or the desire for it, actually exhibits a preoccupation with visible, material reality. It takes the reality/truth orientation of "rationalism" to an extreme. Fixated on sensory detail, it employs or evokes only a corporeal supernaturalism. Supernatural experience is reduced to a violation of nature, an intrusion from the spiritual world that is available to the senses. Otto, on whose formulation of the "numinous" critics depend, contends that the concept of the "supernatural" as a violation of natural law is itself "a solidly rationalist theory":

a man encounters an occurrence that is not “natural”, in the sense of being inexplicable by the laws of nature. Since it has actually occurred, it must have had a cause; and, since it has no “natural” cause, it must (so it is said) have a supernatural one. (144)

Contrary to Varma’s opinion that the Gothic reveals “an awestruck apprehension of Divine immanence penetrating diurnal reality” (211), the very physicality of the supernatural distances the Divine. If the Divine is immanent, it does not have to “penetrate” or intrude. Indeed, Coleridge takes up a position on supernatural wonders or miracles quite opposite to that entailed by Varma’s reading and by the corporealized and displaced supernatural. Concerning biblical miracles he writes in *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816) that “it was only to overthrow the usurpation exercised in and through the senses, that the senses were miraculously appealed to” (10). God, that is, resorts to miracles only when people lack spiritual awareness. Contrary to the view inscribed in literary supernaturalism, Coleridge writes in the *Biographia*, “A debility and dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses, do . . . render the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism” (*BL* 1: 30). One might say that when rationalism conceives of the supernatural, the result can only be sensationalism: the fiends and “flesh-and-blood ghosts” that Coleridge derides.

But if rationalism conceives of the supernatural in sensationalist terms, it does so only to finally reject it as contrary to nature and therefore imaginary. The manifestations and intrusions in these narratives are, after all, displaced to pre-enlightenment. They are no more a reflection of the writers’ actual beliefs than hobbits



are of Tolkien's. It is this very distancing that gives writers the liberty to exploit the supernatural in the first place. But it is also this very distancing that most embodies the rationalism that Coleridge will seek to resist with his own mystery poems. For in its valorization of reason and enlightenment over imagination and the superstitious past, literary supernaturalism effectively equates the "real" with the empirically verifiable, and flattens the world into the one dimension amenable to sense and understanding. In so doing, it cuts itself off from ever knowing the supernatural dimensions as Coleridge knew them.

## PART II

***“A Visionary in Two Very Different Senses”:***

***The Coleridgean Supernatural***

## Imagining "Bright Reality"

In the same year that Coleridge wrote to William Lisle Bowles expressing his weariness of the supernatural fiction he was reviewing, he also wrote to Thomas Poole regarding supernaturalism of another sort. In this important and oft-quoted "autobiographical" letter, Coleridge recalls an astronomy lesson he received from his father. When he was eight years old, they walked home together one wintry night, and his father told him the names of the stars, their relative sizes, and orbits. The memory of his response to this information elicits a personal manifesto on non-rational ways of knowing:

I heard him with a profound delight & admiration; but without the least mixture of wonder or incredulity. For from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c--my mind had been habituated *to the Vast*---& I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight*--even at that age. Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii?---I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative.--I know no other way of giving the mind a love of "the Great", & "the Whole".--Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess--They

contemplate nothing but *parts*--and all *parts* are necessarily little--and the Universe to them is but a mass of *little things*.--It is true, that the mind *may* become credulous & prone to superstition by the former method--but are not the Experimentalists credulous even to madness in believing any absurdity, rather than believe the grandest truths, if they have not the testimony of their own senses in their favor?--I have known some who have been *rationaly* educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became a blank & they saw nothing--and denied (very illogically) that any thing could be seen; and uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power--& called the want of imagination Judgment, & the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy!-- (CL 1: 354-55)

This letter reveals not only Coleridge's approval of literary departures from reality, despite his criticism of Radcliffe and Lewis for their deviations from "nature," but also his belief in a kind of awareness not available to the "rationally educated"--those who proceed step-by-step from the evidence of the senses. This rationalism is the very approach described by J. S. Mill as the anti-mystical philosophy that Jeremy Bentham refined and propagated and against which Coleridge reacted.<sup>1</sup> Echoing

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<sup>1</sup>Coleridge, of course, was not alone in his frustration with the "microscopic acuteness" favoured by many of his contemporaries. Wordsworth's *Prelude* contains a similar and detailed description of a "rationally educated" child:

A miracle of scientific lore,

.....

... he sifts, he weighs;

All things are put to question; he must live

Knowing that he grows wiser every day

Coleridge's remark that every man is either an Aristotelian or a Platonist. Mill asserts that every Englishman in the nineteenth century is either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean (397)--the former adhering to sense experience and the faculties that generalize from it, the latter affirming "the vision and the faculty divine" (404-05, 407). In this early letter Coleridge already displays, even outlines, his resistance to his "enlightened age" and his reason for opposing its style of rationalism.

Here Coleridge claims acquaintance with a dimension of reality that he believes is unavailable to the "Experimentalists" who degrade and disenfranchise the imagination. He asserts that since childhood he has had the capacity to apprehend the world more holistically than others, and he links this capacity to his reading of literature that suspended his reliance on sense. He later names such reliance the "despotism of the eye," the "strong sensuous influence" that makes us "restless because invisible

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Or else not live at all, and seeing too  
 Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
 Into the dimpling cistern of his heart:  
 For this unnatural growth the trainer blame.  
 Pity the tree. . . .

. . . . .  
 Oh! give us once again the wishing cap  
 Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat  
 Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,  
 And Sabra in the forest with St. George!  
 The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap  
 One precious gain, that he forgets himself.  
 (5: 315-29, 341-46; *SPP* 248-49)

The utilitarian excesses of this commitment to scientific knowledge also receive heavy satirical criticism in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*. The novel begins with the teaching methods of Gradgrind:

THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. (12)

things are not the objects of vision" (*BL* 1: 107). and complains that even among philosophers of his age "the *conceivable* is reduced within the bounds of the *picturable*" (*BL* 1: 288). While Coleridge does concede in his letter that such appeals to imagination, in this case stories of imaginary and magical beings, may engender a credulous and superstitious mind (his stress on "may" suggests that he does not think it likely), he asserts that they can also cultivate a power that protects against another kind of superstition: the incredulity that can conceive of nothing beyond the "testimony of the senses." Coleridge decries the opposition of faculties not, as the antiquarians do, because it robs people of a richer imaginary or deeper emotional life, but because it robs them of knowledge. The rationalists fail to see because they have "uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power--& called the want of imagination Judgment. & the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy!"

In short, in this letter to Poole Coleridge challenges the notion that imagination obstructs the accurate perception of reality. By linking the rationalists' inability to see with their rejection of imagination, he attributes to imagination a noetic, not merely emotive, function: imagination is an organ of knowledge whose negation results in a wrong sense of the world and a wrong relationship to it. The rational or discursive mode of knowing that proceeds through "step-by-step" analysis cannot grasp the whole, but can only regard the universe as a collection of things, as a lepidopterist regards his collection of butterflies. There is a dimension of reality that this rational faculty, which Coleridge later names the "Understanding," cannot apprehend. If this faculty works alone, it will end by taking a part for the whole, "illogically" assuming that what it cannot see does not exist.

The work of imagination implied in Coleridge's letter goes beyond an intuitive grasp of the whole that is merely a different way of knowing the same reality to which the discursive reason applies itself in its step-by-step fashion. Such, for instance, is the *ingenium* or "insight" discussed by Ernesto Grassi. His theory in *Rhetoric as Philosophy* bears similarities to Coleridge's comments on intuition. Grassi argues that the first principles upon which philosophy depends cannot be acquired through rational thought and cannot be demonstrated, but are established by "ingenium," insight that seizes upon the relationships among things and their meaning to human beings (8-9). The grasp "precedes the deduction because we can draw conclusions only from what we have already grasped" (45). Similarly, Coleridge asserts that philosophy depends upon "intuitive knowledge as distinguished from the discursive" (*BL* 1: 241-43). But for Coleridge the Whole, or the Vast, involves a spiritual dimension beyond or deeper than the world of nature and social reality, or *res*, as Grassi calls it (8-9). It is more akin to Otto's category of numinous experience: it is a "cognition" in the face of the "vast, living totality and reality of things" of a "sheer overplus, in addition to empirical reality" (Otto 146); it can be "awakened," but "cannot be taught" (60); it begins where rational conceptualization ends (5). Otto remarks that "it is one thing merely to believe in a reality beyond the senses and another to have experience of it also; it is one thing to have ideas of 'the holy' and another to become consciously aware of it as an operative reality" (143). Coleridge claims just such an awareness.

He had already declared the incommensurability of empirical and rational modes of inquiry with this reality in 1796 in the poem that would eventually become "The Destiny of Nations":

For what is Freedom. but the unfettered use  
Of all the powers which God for use had given?  
But chiefly this. him First. him Last to view  
Through meaner powers and secondary things  
Effulgent. as through clouds that veil his blaze.  
For all that meets the bodily sense I deem  
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet  
For infant minds; and we in this low world  
Placed with our backs to bright Reality.  
That we may learn with young unwounded ken  
The substance from its shadow. . . .

. . . . .

But some there are who deem themselves most free  
When they within this gross and visible sphere  
Chain down the wingéd thought. scoffing ascent.  
Proud in their meanness: and themselves they cheat  
With noisy emptiness of learned phrase.  
Their subtle fluids. impacts. essences.  
Self-working tools. uncaused effects. and all  
Those blind Omniscients. those Almighty Slaves.  
Untenanted creation of its God. (ll. 13-23; *PW* 1: 132)

Coleridge here asserts a “power” that perceives “bright Reality” through a translucent



natural world. These lines anticipate Coleridge's definition of a symbol in *The Statesman's Manual*:

a Symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. (LS 30)

J. Robert Barth's explication of this definition, though given in relation to "Coleridge's Scriptural Imagination," suits and beautifully illumines the "idea of the holy" as expressed in "The Destiny of Nations":

The "Unity" of which Coleridge speaks is of course God, conceived of here (implicitly) as light: if a symbol of the Eternal is "translucent," then God is the light that passes through it--the Eternal revealing itself "through and in the Temporal." . . . When light passes through a translucent medium--a stained-glass window, for instance--the light and the window, however distinguishable, are not separate. To use another Coleridgean word, the two realities "interpenetrate." . . . In contemplating the stained-glass window, we are at the same time seeing the sunlight, not in a blinding glare too bright for our eyes, but softened--its unity broken into some of its component colors, so that our poor eyes can look upon it and live. (137-38)

The ability to see the light of God in nature, to see "bright Reality" in "clouds that veil

his blaze.” as Barth suggests. resides in the imagination which alone “can encompass such knowledge” (139).

To put the matter in Otto’s terms. the apprehension of Bright Reality constitutes numinous awareness; and the power “of *genuinely* cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearances” he calls “the faculty of *divination*” (144). Otto explains that “divination” has nothing to do with the “supernaturalistic” approach of rationalism:

Divination [according to rationalism] consists in the fact that a man encounters an occurrence that is not ‘natural’. in the sense of being inexplicable by the laws of nature. Since it has actually occurred, it must have had a cause; and, since it has no ‘natural’ cause, it must (so it is said) have a supernatural one. This theory of divination is a genuine, solidly rationalist theory, put together with rigid concepts in a strict demonstrative form and intended as such. And it claims that the capacity or faculty of divination is the *understanding*, the faculty of reflection in concept and demonstration. The transcendent is here proved as strictly as anything can be proved, logically from given premisses. (144-45)

“Genuine ‘divination.’” on the other hand, perceives the revelation of the divine nature without dependence upon “natural law”; it concerns itself not with the “phenomenon” and how it came about, “but with what it *means*, that is, with its significance as a ‘sign’ of the holy” (145). Ultimately, divination embraces the holy as it is revealed in the universe of “signs.” So Coleridge says in “The Destiny of Nations.” “all that meets the bodily sense I deem / Symbolical, one mighty alphabet” (ll. 18-19). The refusal to use this power of divination, one of “the powers which God for use had given” (14), will,

as it were, squeeze God from the world.

Coleridge does not, of course, employ the term "divination," but he does speak of "the Vision and the Faculty divine" (*BL* 1: 241). The expression was not one of his own inventions, but Wordsworth's. In *The Excursion* Wordsworth gives this name to the "highest gifts" men can have, gifts that make men "Poets" though they lack the benefits of books and education (1: 77-83; *SPP* 25). It is an "inward light" (1: 95). The particular character to whom Wordsworth attributes it in his poem is a pedlar.

Having grown up among the terrors and beauties of nature,

While yet a child, and long before his time,

Had he perceived the presence and the power

Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed

So vividly great objects that they lay

Upon his mind like substances, whose presence

Perplexed the bodily sense. . . . (1: 134-30; *SPP* 26)

This perception is divination all over again--the power of cognizing the *numen praesens* at the very heart of Otto's "idea of the holy" (11). Coleridge equates the vision and faculty divine with the "philosophic imagination," an organ of spirit. Reflecting his sense of a spiritual world that is an "operative reality" (to use Otto's words), Coleridge writes in the *Biographia*: "all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit . . ." (1: 241-42). Imagination, as we have also seen in the letter to Poole, divines the spiritual dimension that makes the universe more than a "mass of little things," more than the sum of its parts.

This organ of divination I shall call the “divining imagination.” It is well characterized by Henry Corbin’s introduction to the “Creative Imagination” of Sufic mysticism:

Here we shall not be dealing with imagination in the usual sense of the word: neither with fantasy, profane or otherwise, nor with the organ which produces imaginings identified with the unreal; nor shall we even be dealing exactly with what we look upon as the organ of esthetic creation. We shall be speaking of an absolutely basic function, correlated with a universe peculiar to it, a universe endowed with a perfectly “objective” existence and perceived precisely through the Imagination.

(3)

This imagination is not a theoretical postulate, but an organ of experience that corresponds to the term “vision” in Wordsworth’s phrase--a phrase Coleridge uses not only of the “philosophic imagination,” but of Böhme’s genuine “visionary” powers as well: for, though Böhme was subject to delusions, he also gives “incontestible proofs, that he possessed in very truth ‘The Vision and Faculty divine!’” (*CM* 1: 558).

As an organ of Supernatural awareness, the divining imagination is not strictly identical with either the reason or the imagination, as Coleridge sometimes schematizes them. Indeed, efforts to explicate the distinctions seem inevitably to move toward the interpenetration of the categories. Coleridge’s most basic concern in his struggle with his enlightened age was to reassert an intuitive, non-rational mode of knowing over and above the discursive, categorizing impulses of the understanding. This essentially religious impulse did not always conform to the divisions of faculty psychology. To a

large extent Coleridge's philosophy was, as Haven asserts, an expression of experience. Coleridge himself remarked near the end of his life, "It is wonderful, how closely Reason and Imagination are connected, and Religion the union of the two. Now the Present is the Epoch of the Understanding and the Senses" (*Friend* 1: 203n). For this reason, I believe, scholars who work with Coleridge's definitions end by stressing the importance of the division not between reason and imagination, but between reason and imagination over against (or over and above) understanding and sense.

Owen Barfield, for one, works from a succinct "order of mental powers" given by Coleridge himself in a marginal note on W. G. Tenneman (Barfield 101, 127, 219):

Reason  
Imagination  
Understanding  
Understanding  
Fancy  
Sense

Reason is the highest, and not really a "power" at all but a gift that contains and illumines the others (94-95). It is the fire Prometheus brought from heaven, and it separates man from the animals (113-14). It enables us to conceive of abstract principles, indeed to think actively beyond generalizations from the senses (105-09). The imagination Coleridge divides into primary, which makes possible "experience of an outer world at all," and secondary, which recreates that world as "a whole and parts organically related to one another" (81). Yet Coleridge himself says, "The completing power which unites clearness with depth, the plenitude of the sense with the comprehensibility of the understanding, is the imagination, impregnated with which the understanding itself becomes intuitive, and a living power" (*LS* 69). Barfield warns that

these “mental powers” are not separate faculties, but the exertion of the same faculties in different ways. Their definitions overlap because the powers interpenetrate (92-93).

Ultimately, “the line drawn between understanding and understanding” is the important one, and “no abstraction” to Coleridge. That line represents the point at which “the will may turn either way”--toward or away from the light of reason (107). As Coleridge says, “the Understanding wherever it does not possess or use the Reason, as another and inward eye, may be defined [*sic*] the conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phaenomena of perception . . . .” (*Friend* 1: 156). Barfield remarks that the “shuttering of the understanding from the light of reason” erases the “essential difference between man and beast.” It amounts to “existential suicide” and is the form of “Enlightenment” that Coleridge strove to resist (101).

Leslie Brisman is in good company, therefore, when he finds that in Coleridge’s thought reason and imagination become identified with one another and with the Protestant concept of an “inner light.” They are “supernatural” faculties over against the “natural” faculties of mind, the understanding and the fancy, which are both limited to the “fixities and counters of sense experience” (125). Brisman begins his discussion by quoting one of Coleridge’s notes on Hooker. Here Coleridge says, “reason is supernatural,” and he links it to “the *light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*” (Brisman 124). Reason becomes a supra-rational means of coming to faith. Coleridge urges that faith cannot be awakened by “arguments of the common Understanding grounded on miracles” (*CM* 1: 462); for him, it is “the capacity of the mind to come to faith without logical proof or evidence of the senses that declares the

supernatural agency of human Reason" (Brisman 125).<sup>2</sup> Brisman argues in the same vein that the primary imagination is not simply an agent that organizes sense perception, but a faculty that perceives the world as a whole created by God.<sup>3</sup> The central point Brisman's article emphasizes is that Coleridge did indeed believe the human mind was capable of apprehending Supernatural (divine) reality. Brisman reflects that "in calling Reason supernatural, Coleridge pushes the crucial bourn between heaven and earth back to earth, to man, to a line traced (or retraced, rather, in every imaginative experience) within the mind of man" (125). Brisman rightly makes Coleridge's divine Supernaturalism a matter of perception and awareness, not intrusion.

James Engell, in *The Creative Imagination*, explains the relationship between reason and imagination as one of interpretation. Coleridge's use of the term "reason" was a deliberate effort to "rescue" it from its degradation at the hands of "rational

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<sup>2</sup>Although Brisman does not say so, this capacity constitutes divination as defined by Otto, the power to grasp the Divine without dependence on breaches of "natural law" evaluated through "rationalistic" rules of investigation and demonstration (144-45). Brisman likewise shows Coleridge's thinking on miracles to be in accord with Otto's divination: "signs" are "pointers" rather than "proof" (Brisman 133). Brisman quotes Coleridge: "Miracles must be judged by the doctrine which they confirm [,] not the doctrine by the miracle [,] The Romanists argue preposterously while they would prove the truth by miracles, whereas they should prove the miracles by the truth" (Brisman 133, his brackets).

<sup>3</sup>He argues that in contrast to the image-making faculty or fancy, which along with the understanding, works on the "fixities and counters of sense experience," the primary imagination (which Coleridge calls "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception"), is "the agent and power by which human Perception is distinguished from mere physical, animal sight" (Brisman 125-26). Brisman contends, "'Human perception' is man's capacity to view the world whole, to view the world as the organic creation of the living Power, God" (126). He thus attributes to the primary imagination a function similar to the unifying work that Barfield attributes to the secondary imagination. Brisman points out that many discussions of Coleridge's primary imagination seem to ignore the word "human" and treat "perception" as if it meant "ordinary seeing, a faculty man shares with the brutes" (126 n7).

empiricism.” For Coleridge, he reminds us. “Reason is an immediate and intuitive beholding of essential truths, ‘having a similar relation to the Intelligible or Spiritual, as SENSE has to the Material or Phenomenal’” (Engell 336-37). This intuition is as experiential as sense impression, but is supersensual. Its truths, as Engell points out, quoting Coleridge, are “inconceivable. For *to conceive* is a function of the Understanding” (Engell 337-38). The imagination translates the intuitions of the reason into symbols that the understanding can apprehend. It is the “all-connecting nerve” that enables reason to inform all the faculties of the human mind (338). But Engell also goes on to say that Coleridge’s definition of the primary imagination is such that “the imagination not only harmonizes all faculties of mind but is in direct and truthful relation to the dynamic of matter and spirit in nature” (340). The imagination

not only unifies the mind in one process but also *is* (or is at least a part of) the creative force of eternal reason as it works in the universe. This conclusion clarifies the claim that imagination in its highest sense, . . . is at one with “the vision and faculty divine.” (341)

Imagination, in other words, participates in divine reality.

In their introduction to the *Biographia*, Engell and Bate explain that in referring to “the vision and the faculty divine” as the “philosophic imagination” (*BL* 1: 241), Coleridge was reaching back past the German transcendentalists to figures who “had always spoken of intuitions or visions” (*BL* 1: xcvi). Milton, for instance, “endorsed intuitive reason,” and Bacon “recognised ‘imaginative or insinuating reason’, a close approximation of intuition, as well as religious visions transmitted by the imagination.” The “connection” of intuition with the imagination goes back to Plotinus, to whom



Coleridge appeals when he speaks of the “philosophic imagination.” As these references show, intuitive modes of knowing have not always been carefully or easily distinguished as belonging to either reason or imagination. Engell and Bate summarize Coleridge’s connection with the passage of the *Enneads* he cites in chapter twelve:

the key is intuition, and Coleridge thinks of it as a “sacred power”. Our intuitions, our philosophic imaginations, meet the divine on a middle ground where the divine chooses to appear to us. (*BL* 1: xcvi).

Richard Holmes says simply that the *Biographia* reveals

the religious basis of his vision, far beyond any such affirmation in Kant or Schelling. The Imagination was, fundamentally, the faculty that communicated with divine creative power in the universe. Through it, man could bear witness to knowledge beyond the limits of discursive Reason. (*Reflections* 412)

In terms remarkably similar to those of Engell and Bate as well as of Holmes, Corbin speaks of the Sufic imagination as an “intermediate universe” between the world of sense and the world of spirit (181). It is the “organ of theophanies” by whose operation the world of Mystery is revealed (189-90). This connective tissue between the human and divine, the corporeal and incorporeal, the natural and the Supernatural is the faculty or power that makes Coleridge’s Bright Reality worthy of comment, makes it a reality that can be apprehended and encountered, not merely deduced or assented to. Indeed, according to Coleridge, “passive acquiescence” can hardly be called belief (*BL* 1: 203). It is this almost sensory (yet not physical) power of communication that I call the divining imagination.

Coleridge describes just such a moment of encounter in "This Lime-Tree Bower.  
My Prison" (1797):

Struck with deep joy . . . I have stood.  
Silent with swimming sense; 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. (ll. 38-43; *PW* 1: 180)

This passage contains elements of classical mystical experience--the alteration in consciousness that comes with the cessation of sensory distractions, the joy, the apprehension of unity and meaning, the sense of encounter. Nor should the claim to such experience be dismissed as mere posturing just because Coleridge adopts the persona of a visionary bard in other poems, such as "Ode to the Departing Year" (1796) and "Religious Musings" (1796). In these poems, the claims to privileged knowledge are presented with great drama and apocalyptic effects, and the insights offered are highly propositional. The prophetic conventions allow Coleridge to deliver himself of his opinions with a force that might otherwise seem ridiculous.

The tone of "This Lime-Tree Bower," on the other hand, is quiet and personal, and contains nothing that requires displacement onto a prophetic persona. Here the knowledge gained is knowledge *of*, rather than knowledge *that*. The "mystical" moment seems to arise, both in the experience and in the writing of the poem, from contemplation. In addition, the acute observation and delicate description of nature in this and the other conversation poems is consistent with the effects of mystical

experience. Such transformations of consciousness transform the world: in the words of a mystic of our own day, they bring “an unmistakably enhanced perception of lights, colors, beauty, goodness, virtue and harmony” (Gopi Krishna 38).

Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” (1798) manifests the same kind of contemplative perception. Allan L. Smith’s description of the changes wrought by a spontaneous experience of “Cosmic Consciousness” reads like an abstract of Coleridge’s poem:

One important after-effect of CC [Cosmic Consciousness] that I soon discovered was the ability to create a subtle shift in consciousness. By quieting myself within, my inner mental chatter almost stopped and I became calm and present centered. Perception of the world and myself were both especially clear. The world seemed benign and ‘right’ with everything as it was ‘supposed to be’. There was a great sense of inner peace. (Smith and Tart 101)

Coleridge finds that “The Frost performs its secret ministry” in the stillness of the night, when he has calmed himself after the bustle of the day, “with all the numberless goings-on of life, / Inaudible as dreams,” and sits alone with his sleeping child (ll. 1-13; *PW* 1: 240). As he focuses on his present surroundings, “abstruser musings” fall away, approximating the shutting down of mental chatter. He becomes aware of the rightness of the world and the presence of God in all things that he believes his child will experience:

. . . so shalt thou see and hear

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible

Of that eternal language. which thy God

Utters. who from eternity doth teach

Himself in all. and all things in himself.

Great universal Teacher! he shall mould

Thy spirit. and by giving make it ask. (ll. 58-64; *PW* 1: 242)

Coleridge's final words of benediction reveal awareness even of the silent action of the cold. changing moisture to crystal on this magical night:

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee.

.....

..... whether the eave-drops fall

Heard only in the trances of the blast.

Or if the secret ministry of frost

Shall hang them up in silent icicles.

Quietly shining to the quiet Moon. (ll. 65-74)

In words that seem to describe the experience portrayed in this poem, Evelyn Underhill writes. "the mysterious vitality of trees. the silent magic of the forest. the strange and steady cycle of its life . . . are curiously friendly to [the soul's] cravings. minister to its inarticulate needs" (191).

The presence perceived with "swimming sense" in "This Lime-Tree Bower" and felt in the "ministry" of the frost is the *numen praesens* of which Otto speaks. It is encountered in these two poems with joy and peace. and is "felt as objective and outside the self" (Otto 11). But it is also the "Presence" that wraps Joan of Arc in horror in "The Destiny of Nations" (ll. 271-73; *PW* 1: 140), the "*mysterium tremendum*" which

is “hidden . . . beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar” and is productive of “religious dread” (Otto 13-14). Coleridge anticipates Otto in acknowledging horror as one effect of the awareness of divine presence. Considering the problem that existence presents to the human mind, Coleridge writes a lengthy passage in *The Friend*, which he later considered among the best pieces he ever wrote (CL 4: 885-6), and in doing so he defines what Otto calls the “numinous”:

Not TO BE, then, is impossible: TO BE, incomprehensible. If thou hast mastered this intuition of absolute existence, thou wilt have learnt likewise, that it was this, and no other, which in the earlier ages seized the nobler minds, the elect among men, with a sort of sacred horror. This it was which first caused them to feel within themselves a something ineffably greater than their own individual nature. . . . The power, which evolved this idea of BEING, BEING in its essence, BEING limitless . . . how shall we name it? The idea itself, which like a mighty billow at once overwhelms and bears aloft--what is it? Whence did it come? In vain would we derive it from the organs of sense: for these supply only surfaces, undulations, phantoms! In vain from the instruments of sensation: for these furnish only the chaos, the shapeless elements of sense! And least of all may we hope to find its origin, or sufficient cause, in the moulds and mechanism of the UNDERSTANDING, the whole purport and functions of which consists in individualization, in outlines and *differencings* by quantity, quality and relation.

. . . . It is an alien . . . . To no class of phenomena or particulars can it be referred. itself being none: therefore. to no faculty by which these alone are apprehended. As little dare we refer it to any form of abstraction or generalization: for it has neither co-ordinate or analogon! It is absolutely one. and that it IS. and affirms itself TO BE. is its only predicate. And yet this power. nevertheless, is! . . . [I]s it not GOD? Either thou knowest it to be GOD. or thou hast called an idol by that awful name! (1: 514-16)

As this quotation reiterates, the reality to which the divining imagination is correlated exceeds the capacity of the senses and the understanding. The overwhelming otherness of the sacred transcends the categories of the understanding and language. Yet it is not only absolutely other; it is also the underlying unity in which all existing things live and move and have their being.<sup>4</sup> It is the ground of the oneness Coleridge expresses in the lines he added to "The Eolian Harp" in 1828:

O! the one Life within us and abroad.

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<sup>4</sup>The paradoxes of transcendence and immanence, otherness and oneness, says Underhill, are as central to Christian mysticism as to Christianity itself (344). Coleridge finds them in "Hebrew Poetry" as well. In 1802 he wrote to William Sotheby:

Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of it's own. & that we are all *one Life*. . . . It must occur to every Reader that the Greeks in their religious poems address always the Numina Loci, the Genii, the Dryads, the Naiads, &c &c--All natural Objects were *dead*--mere hollow Statues--but there was a Godkin or Goddessling *included* in each--In the Hebrew Poetry you find nothing of this poor Stuff . . . . In the Hebrew Poets each Thing has a Life of it's own. & yet they are all one Life. In God they move & live, & *have* their Being--not *had*, as the cold System of Newtonian Theology represents / but *have*. (CL 2: 864-66)

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--

(ll. 26-29; *PW* 1: 101)

It is this intimation of unity in Böhme's writing that compels Coleridge to grant him true visionary status despite his delusions. In his efforts to understand Böhme's experiences, Coleridge reflects,

--Not *all*. nor perhaps exactly *how*, Behmen *saw*; but what, with his former associations he could reproduce in his Consciousness after the Vision had past away--have we in his Writings--and moreover he had but a scanty store of Words, so that he is obliged to repeat the same word with various predicates where more learned men would have established distinct Terms. But even this arose in part out of his deep sense of the oneness and the involution . . . . (*CM* 1: 561)

Coleridge struggles with Böhme's "visionary experiences," but unequivocally affirms that his apprehension of the oneness and co-inherence of all things is a genuine and divine intuition that necessarily defeated attempts to articulate it.

Tim Fulford says plainly that Coleridge "endors[ed] a mystical state of spiritual knowledge" and quotes this striking passage from Coleridge's annotations on Swedenborg as support:

Behmen's "*Language of Nature*" . . . [my ellipsis] struggles upward to a grand *Idea*--may not this have been occasioned by a vain yet ever renewed effort to reproduce in the natural state a somewhat which he had

experienced in the Spiritual World during the privileged moments and occasional openings of his inner man? That certain Relics of a higher state may remain in a lower, as Recollections dimmed down into . . . feelings, or inquietudes of seeking as when we strive to recall a forgotten name or something mislaid but not lost, is no longer a conjecture. (qtd. Fulford "Böhme" 40)

As a notebook entry reveals, Coleridge, true to mystical tradition, affirmed "the transcendency of religious Intuitions over Language, which only by balancing of contradictions can represent or rather re suggest them" (Fulford "Böhme" 41). The intuition of "the oneness and involution" exceeds categories essential to language, and, by implication, the categories of the understanding which works by "differencings," as Coleridge says in his passage on Being. Contradictions can "re suggest" the reality apprehended by non-discursive modes of knowing by defying the very rules of language use. Only by the breakdown of language can language indicate or point to the reality experienced.<sup>5</sup>

The oneness and involution that Coleridge finds suggested in Böhme is the same as the "sense" to which Coleridge alludes in the letter to Poole quoted at the opening of this chapter. His sense of "the Vast" and "the Whole" is not just a matter of seeing all the bits at once, as I have already said. It is the same immanence expressed in the conversation poems--felt in the secret ministry of the frost, uneasily likened to the wind

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<sup>5</sup>Similarly, meditational practices often employ contradiction in order to free the mind from discursive reasoning, as in the case of the famous Zen *koan*, "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" Language, in other words, can be used to transform consciousness, a function which I will discuss in the chapters on Coleridge's "divining poetics."



caressing an eolian harp. It is not available to the "Experimentalists." but only to those who have cultivated the divining imagination.

But these experiences are by Coleridge's own admission temporary and infrequent: they occur only during "privileged moments and occasional openings of his inner man." as he says of Böhme. Therefore, in a letter to John Thelwall, Coleridge expresses a yearning for such awareness in terms very similar to those addressed to Poole only two days earlier:

----I can *at times* feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves, & for themselves--but more frequently *all things* appear little--all the knowledge, that can be acquired, child's play----the universe itself--what but an immense heap of *little* things?--I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all *little*--!--My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something *great*--something *one & indivisible*-- . . . . (CL 1: 349)

Griggs remarks in his headnote to the letter that "the passage . . . shows that he was preoccupied with sublimity at this time" (349). This statement can hardly be doubted, given the currency of the concept in the late eighteenth century and its frequent appearance in the novels of Ann Radcliffe which Coleridge was then reading. But Coleridge goes on to amplify the sort of experience he yearns for by quoting a slightly different version of the lines from "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison" already mentioned above, lines that go beyond "sublimity" to suggest a supra-sensuous awareness of divine presence. Coleridge stresses, however, that these moments of awareness are moments only: "It is but seldom that I raise & spiritualize my intellect to this height" (350). He is more often left with the longing.

Coleridge's complaints themselves suggest the authenticity of his divining imagination. For though "cosmic" or "unitive" consciousness may bring peace, it cannot be sustained. Some people never achieve it more than once. Allan L. Smith, having described his ability after achieving cosmic consciousness to "create a subtle shift in consciousness" that brought "inner peace," goes on to relate,

As the years passed since CC, my ability to attain this state at will has diminished. When it does occur, it seems less profound than previously. I am personally very sad at this loss. . . .

. . . . I have not been able to return to CC, although I have a real longing to do so. However, I can usually recall enough of the experience to know that the world is benign and that my ordinary conscious phenomenal experience can only hint at the true nature of reality. (Smith and Tart 101-102)

Smith's sadness at his loss, his clinging to the memory of the experience, find a parallel in Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Recalling how he used to stand in "an elevated mood" under stars or in the wind at night, Wordsworth muses:

Thence did I drink the visionary power;  
And deem not profitless those fleeting moods  
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
That they are kindred to our purer mind  
And intellectual life; but that the soul,  
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense

Of possible sublimity. whereto  
With growing faculties she doth aspire.  
With faculties still growing. feeling still  
That whatsoever point they gain. they yet  
Have something to pursue. (2: 311-22; *SPP* 214)

Wordsworth's sense of loss and his desire to ameliorate it through memory and faith also suffuse the "Intimations" ode:

What though the radiance which was once so bright  
Be now for ever taken from my sight,  
Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death.

In years that bring the philosophic mind. (ll. 175-186; *SPP* 190)

Passages like these reveal Wordsworth's strong mystical orientation, most recently and explicitly explored in John G. Rudy's *Wordsworth and the Zen Mind*. But traces of such an orientation exist in Coleridge's writing as well. They have perhaps been overshadowed by his "abstruser musings" which tend to draw scholars into discussions

of his philosophy, theology, and aesthetic theory.

In *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, Thomas McFarland discusses “modalities of fragmentation.” Addressing both Coleridge’s conviction of organic unity and his conflicting sense of fragmentation, McFarland suggests that these two mental attitudes are interrelated: “organism [*sic*] and symbolism,” the two major “doctrines” of Romanticism, are both “endeavors to adjudicate the relationship of parts to wholes. They are, moreover, concerns in which, although the wholes are accorded theoretical honor, the experienced reality is that of parts” (26). This experience he calls “diasparactive awareness,” which “without faith . . . would be horror” (44). Coleridge himself admits to Thelwall,

--My mind feels as if it ached to behold and have . . . something *one and indivisible*--and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! (CL 1: 349)

“The sublime and the symbolic,” McFarland explains, “have in common a diasparactive structure: the object itself, which is present to the mind, implies a larger whole, which is not” (30). A conviction of unity arises from fragmentation interpreted by faith, which is “the necessary complement of the diasparactive perception of reality” (44).

But the model of mysticism provides another possibility, that for some people unity sometimes becomes experience, presence becomes reality. Faith then functions in the absences, or may itself give way to awareness, as Coleridge’s magnificent closing words of the *Biographia* suggest:

Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason

has reached its own Horizon: and that Faith is then but its continuation: even as the Day softens away into sweet Twilight. and Twilight. hushed and breathless. steals into the Darkness. It is Night. sacred Night! the upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone: and the outward Beholding is fixed on the sparks twinkling in the awful depth. though Suns of other Worlds. only to preserve the Soul steady and collected in its pure *Act* of inward Adoration to the great I AM. and to the filial WORD that re-affirmeth it from Eternity to Eternity. whose choral Echo is the Universe. (2: 247-48)

Yet for those who can so “spiritualize” their “intellect” as to achieve unitive awareness. diasparactive awareness might indeed follow; moments of wholeness magnify the sense of fragmentation. of “part-ness.” upon return to the usual mode of consciousness. Evelyn Underhill explains that for many the phases of mystical experience include “strongly marked oscillations between ‘states of pleasure’ and ‘states of pain’” (168). A sense of fragmentation and alienation is the antistrophe of presence; the self feels itself to be a mere “scrap of the cosmos” (205). She speaks of the “Dark Night of the Soul” as a phase between the onset of mystical experiences and the development of a deeper. more controlled and sustained mysticism. At this stage. the mystic experiences the absence of God with feelings of “impotence. blankness. solitude” (381). A period of “psychic fatigue” characterized by “mental and moral disorder” afflicts the subject. who may lose control of both his spiritual and “worldly affairs” (384). The absence of God is accompanied by the “apparent withdrawal . . . of that . . . transcendent Ground or Spark of the soul, on which the self has long felt its

whole real life to be based. Hence, its very means of contact with the spiritual world vanishes; and as regards all that matters, it does indeed seem to be 'dead'" (390). The subject suffers from "a complete emotional lassitude" (391).

Underhill's description seems a perfect match with "Dejection: an Ode." In this poem, Coleridge complains of a loss of affect. "A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear" that empties the stars and moon and clouds of power: "I see them all so excellently fair, / I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!" (ll. 21, 37-38; *PW* 1: 364). Dead "The passion and the life, whose fountains are within" (l. 46; *PW* 1: 365). Gone the power of the divining imagination, the "means of contact with the spiritual world" that Underhill speaks of. "Dejection" is the obverse of the conversation poems. The function of the "shaping spirit of imagination" (l. 86; *PW* 1: 366) is not depicted here as the power of wishful thinking that obscures the cold hard facts--as it is, for instance, in Southey's "Imagination and Reality." Southey, by so entitling his poem, likens imagination to a "deceitful haze" that makes things more fair than they really are:

Loitering and musing thoughtfully stood I,

For well those hills I knew,

And many a time had travell'd them all o'er;

Yet now such change the hazy air had wrought,

That I could well have thought

I never had beheld the scene before.

But while I gazed the cloud was passing by;

On the slow air it slowly travell'd on,

Eftsoon and that deceitful haze was gone,

Which had beguiled me with its mockery:

And all things seem'd again the things they were.

Alas! but then they were not half so fair

As I had shaped them in the hazy air! (ll. 11-23; *Poems* 741)

Southey's poem exemplifies a mindset described by Corbin. Modern thought, he says, is incapable of granting ontological status to the dimension of imagination:

there has ceased to be a schema of reality admitting of an intermediate universe between, on the one hand, the universe of sensory data and the concepts that express their empirically verifiable laws, and, on the other hand, a spiritual universe, a kingdom of Spirits, to which only faith still has access. The degradation of the Imagination into fantasy is complete. . . . [T]here has ceased to be an intermediate level between empirically verifiable reality and unreality pure and simple. All indemonstrable, invisible, inaudible things are classified as creations of the Imagination, that is, of the faculty whose function it is to secrete the *imaginary*, the unreal. (181)

But not even in "Dejection" does Coleridge succumb to the notion that imagination is false or opposed to reality. Rather, Coleridge feels by its negation the imagination's power to participate in Bright Reality, the power to both perceive and create the world as a living, meaningful whole. "Reality" without the interpenetration of imagination is not only a heap of little things; it is less real; it is "Reality's dark dream" ("Dejection" l. 95; *PW* 1: 367). Corbin's clarification of the "docetism" of Sufism offers an illuminating comparison with Coleridge's:

it is a docetism that is far from degrading "reality" by making it an "appearance"; on the contrary, by transforming it into appearance it makes this "reality" transparent to the transcendent meaning manifested in it. This docetism attaches no value to a material fact unless it is appearance, that is, apparition. (244)

The organ that transforms reality into "apparition" or theophany is the "Creative Imagination"; it works to raise "sensory data to a higher level . . . so permitting things and beings to fulfill their theophanic function" (239).

Coleridge's "docetism" emerges in the *Biographia*:

The highest perfection of natural philosophy would consist in the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect. The phaenomena (*the material*) must wholly disappear, and the laws alone (*the formal*) must remain. Thence it comes, that in nature itself the more the principle of law breaks forth, the more does the *husk* drop off, the phaenomena themselves become more spiritual and at length cease altogether in our consciousness. (1: 256)

Lest we think that by "spiritual" Coleridge means only "abstract" or "ideal," he completes the paragraph in a way that renders the "phaenomena"--the appearances -- theophanic indeed:

The theory of natural philosophy would then be completed . . . when the heavens and the earth shall declare not only the power of their maker, but the glory and the presence of their God, even as he appeared to the great



prophet during the vision of the mount in the skirts of his divinity.

(1: 256)

“Dejection” prefigures this “docetism.” The loss of imagination traps one within a purely material world--“that inanimate cold world allowed / To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd” (ll. 51-52; *PW* 1: 365)--a world in which no divinity is apparent. The loss of imagination cuts one off from the Bright Reality that is the ground of all existence. Without this ground, empirical, verifiable reality becomes a mere phantom. “Dejection” glimpses this spectral material world. “Reality’s dark dream.” And such a world is the inevitable end of those philosophies that hold imagination to be the inverse of reason and the Supernatural a departure from reality. Coleridge passionately declares in *The Statesman’s Manual* many years later.

when educated men will be ashamed to look abroad for truths that can be only found within; within themselves they will discover. *intuitively* will they discover. the distinctions between “the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” and the understanding . . . . This light . . . comes as to its own. Being rejected, it leaves the understanding to a world of dreams and darkness: for in it alone is life and the LIFE IS THE LIGHT OF MEN. What then but *apparitions* can remain to a Philosophy, which strikes death through all things visible and invisible; satisfies itself then only when it can explain those abstractions of the outward senses, which by an unconscious irony it names indifferently facts and phaenomena. *mechanically*--that is, by the laws of Death; and brands with the name of Mysticism every solution grounded in Life, or

the powers and intuitions of Life? (*LS* 95-96)

Without this intuitive faculty, this divining imagination, the world becomes a veritable hell. Coleridge remarks that "the Mystics have joined in representing the state of the reprobate spirits as a dreadful dream in which there is no sense of reality, not even of the pangs they are enduring--an eternity without time, and as it were below it--God present without the manifestation of his presence" (*BL* 2: 235).

Coleridge, nevertheless, takes care not to include himself among "the Mystics," as the two preceding quotations show. Many of the passages in which he refers to them reveal his efforts to keep his distance from them. But it was not without reason that his enemies "gossiped" about him "as devoted to metaphysics, and worse than all to a system incomparably nearer to the visionary flights of Plato, and even to the jargon of the mystics, than to the established tenets of Locke" (*BL* 2: 240). If Coleridge could never wholeheartedly embrace mysticism as a way of life to be pursued and cultivated, neither could he reject it. Fulford quotes an annotation on Tennemann in which Coleridge approves mystic contemplation as "the Ideal Power, by which the purified Soul is enabled to contemplate God and supersensual Realities" ("Böhme" 41). If Coleridge uses the "jargon of the mystics," as his critics claimed, he does so because it suits his experience. If he defends them publicly despite the inevitable calumny to follow, he does so because they have something to offer his "enlightened age."

Coleridge's discussion of the mystics in the *Biographia* articulates both his caution and his affinity with them. At the same time, it expresses his frustration with rationalism. Of Böhme he refuses to be ashamed, though the learned ridicule "the poor ignorant *shoemaker*" for his errors and delusions (1: 146-47). His defense of Böhme

develops into straightforward criticism of modern philosophy over the two or three hundred years preceding his own lifetime. During this period, Coleridge says, the learned set the limits of so-called "free thought," with the result that

the true depth of science, and the penetration to the inmost centre, from which all the lines of knowledge diverge to their ever distant circumference, was abandoned to the illiterate and the simple, whom unstilled yearning and an original ebullency of spirit had urged to the investigation of the indwelling and living ground of all things. (1: 148)

The mystics, in other words, unlike educated philosophers, were not content with the "microscopic acuteness" of the discursive understanding whose "Characteristic is Clearness without Depth" (LS 69). Depth belongs to "the completing power" of the imagination (69). Without it the educated cannot investigate, as the lowly mystics did, the "living ground" of all things.

Coleridge therefore gratefully acknowledges that the efforts and insights of these unsophisticated men helped to keep his mind from contracting into the one-dimensionality of rationalism:

For the writings of these mystics acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the *heart* in the *head*; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentment [*sic*], that all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of DEATH, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter, into which a sap was yet to be propelled, from some root to which I had not penetrated, if they were to afford my

soul either food or shelter. (*BL* 1: 152)

What Coleridge has in common with Böhme and other esoterics, and what they, according to Henry Corbin, have in common with the esoterics of Islam, is

the perception of an over-all unity, calling for perspectives, depths, transparencies, appeals, which the “realists” of the letter or of dogma have no need of or reject. . . . [I]n the eyes of “esoterics” all this “realism” lacks a dimension or rather the many dimensions of the world . . . . (93)

The imagination is the power that penetrates and reveals these dimensions (93). The danger in relying solely on the senses and the “reflective faculty” is that they can perceive and describe only the surface of reality, the dead skin left behind by the living animal. Without the intuition of what lies beyond or beneath it, the rationalist “mistakes surface for substance” and produces a dead universe (*BL* 1: 107 n7). If one rejects the ministry of the divining imagination and concerns oneself only with the dimension to which discursive reasoning applies, one will eventually assume that the “depths” simply do not exist. This is the “illogical” conclusion which Coleridge laments in his letter to Poole. It is the “enlightenment” he disdains when he writes of the need for men who will “rescue this *enlightened age* from general Irreligion” (*CL* 1: 248). Without the divining imagination, knowledge is stranded on the shoals, the universe collapses into a heap of little things, and reality becomes a dreadful dream.

## Encountering the Spectral Realm

In his letter on “the Vast,” Coleridge intimates his experience of a divining power. In another autobiographical letter to Poole, also in 1797, he recounts his familiarity with a “spectral” power. In the one letter he implies that imagination is an organ of Supernatural perception; in the other he hints that imagination is an organ of hauntings and supernatural visitations. Remembering his childhood, Coleridge relates to Poole how he used to “brood” over marvelous tales, and how one in particular, from *The Arabian Nights*.

made so deep an impression on me . . . 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, & read--. My Father found out the effect, which these books had produced--and burnt them.--So I became a *dreamer* . . . . (CL 1: 347)

The phrase “haunted by spectres.” seems, perhaps, nothing more than a Coleridgean hyperbole for the vivid imagination shared by many children. It may also suggest a reason for not allowing children to read fantastic tales--an opinion which Coleridge controverts in his letter on the Vast. Adults who hold this opinion presumably fear that

any depiction of non-existent powers and beings will engender superstition in the minds of juveniles by rendering them incapable of distinguishing between the real and unreal. Precisely what Coleridge's father thought we are not told, only that he burned the books when he discovered their effect on his son.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, this effect consisted not so much of the erosion of "reality" but the creation of an imaginative world that possessed the emotional force of reality. Coleridge says he became a "dreamer"; he participated in the creation of the unreal sketched out in the stories he read so that these creations existed outside the worlds of the books. They were most powerful in the dark when the obscurity of visual objects weakened the primacy of external, "objective" reality over subjective creations and allowed the "spectres" to assume the upper hand.

This letter may seem to reveal only an unexceptional, if somewhat unhealthy, preference for imaginary worlds over the material world. But it goes on to suggest the imagination's power to create experiences beyond the limits of mere dream or daydream. For in this same letter Coleridge describes other imaginings, specifically his recurring vision of the four angels invoked by his bedtime prayer:

--I suppose, you know the old prayer--

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<sup>1</sup>The senior Coleridge's response is somewhat puzzling given his partiality to Philo Judaeus. As W. K. Thomas and Warren U. Ober point out, the Reverend Mr. Coleridge had written a note on Philo which was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1759 (238). Among Philo's teachings was the tenet that only when the mind rises above the world of the senses can it approach what Philo called "the intelligible world" (Thomas and Ober 91). Philo, in other words, asserted the existence of a Bright Reality and its accessibility through supersensual means, just as Coleridge does in his letter concerning the Vast. In that letter, Coleridge credits his habituation to the Vast to the very books that his father burnt. Apparently, the elder Coleridge perceived only their harmful effects--fear, anxiety, moodiness, and withdrawal into an imaginary world that bore little resemblance to the supersensuous "intelligible world."

Matthew! Mark! Luke! & John!

God bless the bed which I lie on.

Four Angels round me spread.

Two at my foot & two at my bed [head]--

This prayer I said nightly--& most firmly believed the truth of it.--

Frequently have I, half-awake & half-asleep, my body diseased &

fevered by my imagination, seen armies of ugly Things bursting in upon

me. & these four angels keeping them off. (*CL* 1: 348)

Though this vision is clearly, and in Coleridge's own words, a product of imagination, it goes beyond the "imaginary" in the mundane sense. Coleridge was not merely "haunted" by ugly things--an emotive word open to varying degrees of literal or figurative interpretation; rather, he *saw* them "bursting in upon" him on more than one occasion. And the continuing force of "frequently have I seen," as opposed to "did I see," or "I was accustomed to see," carries the phenomenon out of the realm of childhood into a time nearer the writing of the letter. These armies and angels of spiritual warfare are therefore distinct from the spectres of mere daydream. They are also distinct from the "ocular spectra" which Coleridge mentions on more than one occasion and upon which John Livingston Lowes comments. Lowes' discussion of the term revolves around references to images so vivid they seem to be impressed or "flashed upon" the apparatus of the eye itself, like the "after-images . . . retained on the retina of the eye with an independent luminousness and precision after the passing of some flash of vision, as a window which has leaped at night into dazzling configuration in a blaze of lightning hangs printed for an instant in sharp definition upon the dark"

(61-62. 437 n6). While the term "ocular spectra" indicates Coleridge's preoccupation with the problem of "seeing things," the vision of demons and angels constitutes "seeing things" indeed. Coleridge may well have used "ocular spectra" to distinguish vivid impressions and mental images from images that are experienced as independently existing, external beings.

Coleridge's description of angelic protection, in fact, bears a remarkable resemblance to the occasion which first revealed Ibn 'Arabi's "visionary aptitudes." His initiation into the world of Creative Imagination is related by Corbin:

He fell gravely ill; his fever brought on a state of profound lethargy. . . .  
[H]e in his inward universe was besieged by a troop of menacing,  
diabolical figures. But then there arose a marvelously beautiful being,  
exhaling a sweet perfume, who with invincible force repulsed the  
demonic figures. "Who are you?" Ibn 'Arabī asked him. "I am the *Sūra*  
*Yasīn*." His anguished father at his bedside was indeed reciting that *sūra*  
. . . which is intoned specifically for the dying. Such was the energy  
released by the spoken Word that the person corresponding to it took  
form in the subtile intermediate world--a phenomenon not at all rare in  
religious experience. (39)

Coleridge's "dream" parallels Ibn 'Arabi's in several ways. The most obvious is the similar content: angelic figures warding off demonic attackers. The next is the experiential reality of the encounter. Coleridge says that he has *seen*, rather than *dreamed*. "ugly Things" and angels; Ibn 'Arabi spoke, rather than dreamed he spoke, to the "beautiful being." Finally, and most importantly, Coleridge indicates conditions



that parallel those recounted by Corbin. Just as the events are not “imaginary” in the mundane sense, neither are they produced by the imagination during ordinary waking consciousness. Coleridge specifies in his letter that his vision occurred when he was “half-awake & half-asleep” with his imagination in a state of arousal and his body diseased and fevered; Ibn ‘Arabi likewise lay in a state of fever. Also, Coleridge’s supernatural beings were shaped by the prayer that he prayed fervently every night. Ibn ‘Arabi’s were shaped by the words his father kept repeating at his side.

Coleridge’s emphasis on special conditions lifts his account from hyperbole to plausibility because they fit a pattern of visionary experiences shared by others. He himself attributes Böhme’s visions to “the dreams of his own over-excited Nerves” (*CM* 1: 558). Without the vocabulary of modern research available to him, Coleridge locates visionary experiences in “ergotropic” states of consciousness, precisely those omitted by Forman in his work on mysticism (*Problem* 6-7).

But Coleridge’s attribution of visionary experiences to a fevered imagination does not disqualify them as a subject worthy of study. On the contrary, the phenomena that attend certain states of consciousness interest him throughout his life. In 1796 he writes to John Thelwall,

Metaphysics, & Poetry, & ‘Facts of mind’--(i.e. Accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers from Tauth [Thoth], the Egyptian to Taylor, the English Pagan,) are my darling studies.-- (*CL* 1: 260)

In 1818 he gives a lecture on apparitions, presentiments, and witchcraft (*LL* 2: 199-211). Coleridge does not accept the rationalist dismissal of “supernatural” phenomena

as fantasies concocted in the absence of knowledge and reason. He suggests instead that the mind has the power to create a reality of its own. These visions and visitations are actual events, though of a peculiar kind related to special conditions, and they warrant serious attention.

Coleridge was not, of course, alone in considering the relationship of visionary phenomena to dream-states. Kathleen Coburn notes that “the subject of dreams was much in the air, a point where scientific, theological, and literary interests met.” Thomas Beddoes, Humphry Davy, and Thomas Wedgwood, all friends of Coleridge, were keenly interested in dreams (CN 1: 188n). In 1795 Coleridge was reading Andrew Baxter’s *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* (1745). Jennifer Ford summarizes Baxter’s “externalization theory” as the belief that dreams are caused by spiritual beings outside us who actually take possession of the dreamer’s body during sleep (18-19). In December 1801, Coleridge projected a “Collection of Revelations & Visions” in response to Henry More’s account “Of the nature of Enthusiastick Revelations and Visions” (1662). More suggested that

in both these there being a ligation of the outward senses, whatever is then represented to the Mind is of the nature of a *Dream*. But these fits being not so ordinary as our natural sleep, these *Dreams* the precipitant and unskilful are forward to conceit to be Representations extraordinary and supernatural, which they call *Revelations* or *Visions*; of which there can be no certainty at all, no more than of a *Dream*. (qtd. CN 1: 1069n)

Coleridge’s choice of the word “witchery” in his comment on Böhme was no more accidental than his use of “dreams.” His notebooks reveal that his readings in

More included material on the powers of transportation and weatherworking attributed to witches (CN 1: 1000A and n). In 1818, while preparing his lecture on apparitions, magic, and other phenomena, Coleridge was still reading on witchcraft. One of the works to which he had reference, *The Triall of Witch-craft* by John Cotta (1616), recorded the case of a witch who believed herself to have traveled through the air to join other witches on the same night that the author and several others had watched her sleeping. They had attempted to wake her but could not do so even with blows. Another, John Aubrey's *Miscellanies*, reported the activities of a poltergeist (CN 3: 4392 and n). Apparently, Coleridge, like Jess Byron Hollenback today, saw these various types of phenomena, from clairvoyance to out-of-body travel, as related, and his efforts to understand them began early.

Although hardly a treatise on "facts of minds," Coleridge's account of his "four-angels" vision prefigures his later observations regarding his own and others' "phantasms." The significance of the prayer and his state of consciousness becomes more apparent when we examine Coleridge's theory of visions, which he develops in his customary fragmented and unsystematic fashion. In a note of 1809, he speculates on Swedenborg:

Whether Sw's. "memorable Experiences" arose out of a voluntary power of so bedimming or interrupting the impressions from the outward Senses as to produce the same transition of thoughts into things, as ordinarily takes place on passing into Sleep; but without the same suspension of Volition and the Comparative Power, and therefore becoming a voluntary power of transforming connected trains of Thought into schemes of co-

existing and successive Images and Sounds. distinguishable from actual impressions ab extra chiefly by the uniform *significancy* of the former. and by the absence of that apparent *contingency* and *promiscuous* position of Objects by which Nature or the World of the bodily sense is discriminated . . . . (CN 3: 3474)

Coleridge concludes his exasperatingly long run-on sentence by putting aside these questions for the moment: whatever the status of Swedenborg's "memorable experiences." Coleridge decides that his errors on verifiable questions plainly show that his works cannot be accepted as revelation. Yet here, in ostensibly passing over the status of these experiences, Coleridge touches on the variables connected with their production: such events are preceded by an act of mental focus that brings about the suspension or weakening of sensory impressions. He speculates that Swedenborg had developed the ability to shut out sensory stimuli intentionally in order to induce a state of consciousness in which thought, guided by Swedenborg's volition, assumed the externality of sensory experience. This power to externalize and control dreams at least partially explains, for Coleridge, Swedenborg's claims to have had encounters with angels.

Coleridge's hypothesis finds support in the recent work of Hollenback, who observes that "Swedenborg developed a theological system that . . . accorded a very prominent place to the phenomenon of empowerment" (260). "Empowerment," as I mentioned in the introduction, is the name Hollenback gives to the transformation of imagination that occurs as a result of recollection. Hollenback defines "recollection" as that procedure wherein the mystic learns to focus one-pointedly his or her

mind, will, imagination, and emotions on some object or goal. This focused total mobilization of the mystic's affective and intellectual powers, if successfully carried out, eventually shuts down the incessant mental chattering that is normally present as a kind of background noise behind all our activities in the waking state. (94-95).

Through this process of "focusing the mind (and the 'heart')," mystics the world over, "in the most diverse religious and cultural circumstances," abstract themselves from the domination of the senses (97). Freed from sensory experience, the imagination is transformed, or empowered, and acquires the ability to objectify the mystic's thoughts, emotions, and mental images.

Coleridge attributes Luther's legendary "apparitions and all his nightly combats with evil spirits" to much the same process (*Friend* 1: 139), that is, the transformation of consciousness through a species of "recollection." But whereas Swedenborg seemed able to shut out or "bedim" the information of the senses intentionally, Coleridge speculates that Luther probably brought about his alteration in consciousness inadvertently, so that the experiences seemed spontaneous:

Disappointed, despondent, enraged, ceasing to *think*, yet continuing his brain on the stretch in solicitation of a thought; and gradually giving himself up to angry fancies . . . to uneasy fears and inward defiances and floating Images of the evil Being, their supposed personal author; he

sinks. without perceiving it. into a trance of slumber . . . . (*Friend* 1:  
142) <sup>2</sup>

The process Coleridge describes here approximates some meditational practices in which mystics transcend conceptual thought by fixing their minds on an unsolvable problem or contradiction. The discursive faculty eventually collapses, shifting consciousness to another level. As the word "trance" suggests, the slumber caused by this process is no ordinary one. Coleridge describes what might have happened to Luther during this state:

his brain retains its waking energies, excepting that what would have been mere *thoughts* before, now (the action and counter-weight of his senses and of their impressions being withdrawn) shape and condense themselves in *things*, into realities! (*Friend* 1: 142)

This "trance of slumber" is an in-between state, neither sleeping nor waking, that is today called the hypnagogic state. It is a state in which, to use Hollenback's terms, the imagination may become empowered either to objectify and "concretize" what the subject directs, as in the case of Swedenborg, or, in the case of someone like Luther who is not firmly in control of the process, to concretize his thoughts, wishes, and fears (22, 153).

Coleridge's discussion of Luther's encounters culminates in what he calls his

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<sup>2</sup> Although Hollenback makes recollection the key to understanding all mystical experience, from unitive consciousness to out-of-body travel, he does grant that these experiences may seem to "come about spontaneously" since "it is possible that recollectedness can come about without the subject being consciously aware of how he got himself into that state" (130)

“ghost-theory”:

I see nothing improbable in the supposition. that in one of those  
unconscious half sleeps. or rather those rapid alternations of the sleeping  
with the half-waking state. which is *the true witching time*.

the season

Wherein the spirits hold their wont to walk.

the fruitful matrix of Ghosts--I see nothing improbable. that in some one  
of those momentary slumbers. into which the suspension of all Thought  
in the perplexity of intense thinking so often passes; Luther should have  
had a full view of the Room in which he was sitting. of his writing Table  
and all the Implements of Study, as they really existed. and at the same  
time a brain-image of the Devil. vivid enough to have acquired apparent  
*Outness* . . . .

. . . . He deemed himself gifted with supernatural influxes. an  
especial servant of Heaven. a chosen Warrior. fighting as the General of  
a small but faithful troop. against an Army of evil Beings headed by the  
Prince of the Air. These were no metaphorical beings in his  
apprehension. . . . He was *possessed* with them. as with substances  
distinct from himself . . . . (*Friend* 1: 139-40)

Coleridge's theory seems an uncanny anticipation of Hollenback's. Where Hollenback  
speaks of “empowerment.” Coleridge speaks of the “true witching time.” Where  
Hollenback speaks of objectification and concretization. Coleridge speaks of outness and  
substance. Hollenback, in fact. makes empowerment synonymous with the

“‘concretization’ or objectification of thoughts, desires, and emotions” (152n) just as Coleridge defines the witching time as the state in which thoughts, desires, and emotions become beings and objects of encounter.

Jennifer Ford points out that Coleridge conceived of the mind in “spatial terms” (38), and termed his “dreaming space ‘Somnial or Morphean Space’” (33). The space *between* waking and sleeping we might well call the spectral realm. It is the place where thought becomes thing, where dream and reality meet. It is the place where “ocular spectra” become spectres. In Coleridge’s view, this is the realm of supernatural visitations, of ghosts, devils, and angels. Hollenback likewise argues that during a “trance-state, mystics enter into another world, a realm of ‘spiritual’ things, beings, and powers” (33).

But unlike Hollenback, who maintains that one and the same power of imagination is at work in both classic mystical experience and the paranormal phenomena that sometimes accompany it, Coleridge, as we have seen in his remarks on Böhme, is careful to distinguish between “the Vision and Faculty divine” and the “witcheries from the cauldron of his own seething Fancy.” In the *Biographia*, too, he links “supernatural *experiences*” with “dreams” (1: 232), and distinguishes between the “intuitions” and the “delusions” of mystics (2: 235). If there is for Coleridge a divining imagination of Supernatural awareness and perception, there is also a “witching imagination” responsible for “supernatural” intrusions and visitations. This witching imagination, as I shall call it, is, like the divining imagination, an experiential domain not confined to or clearly described by Coleridge’s famous theoretical statements. Both the secondary imagination and the fancy, Coleridge is careful to stipulate, operate in



conjunction with the “conscious will” and by “CHOICE” (*BL* 1: 304-05). While Coleridge recognizes the possibility of controlling one’s “dreams” during the witching time, as in the case of Swedenborg, he specifies repeatedly that the externality of the mind’s creations is a function of less-than-full (waking) consciousness. The primary imagination, which, as Barfield says, “is an act of which we are not normally conscious” (77), nevertheless acts while we are conscious, enabling “experience of the outer world” (Barfield 81). If we conflate the primary with the divining imagination, as Brisman does, we might say it perceives the incorporeal presence of God in creation. The witching imagination, in contrast, interpenetrates reality in a disruptive rather than unifying fashion: it causes the subject’s own peculiar inner world to coalesce with the outer material environment.

The witching imagination, therefore, is, like the divining imagination, an intermediate realm between the “real” and the purely “imaginary,” but it is not usually one in which the human and divine meet. According to Corbin, for the Sufi mystic the Creative Imagination is the intermediate realm, “the place of apparition” in which spiritual beings assume subtile bodies, and from which “paranormal” phenomena are generated (189, 224). For Coleridge, however, the witching imagination creates a space in which thought, image, and emotion acquire “outness” and in which the boundary between dream and reality, internal and external becomes blurred. As my discussion of Coleridge’s poetry will show, he did not consistently reject the possibility that creations of the witching imagination might reveal the world of spirit. Even the marginal note on Böhme, which states and separates so clearly the “two senses” of the term “visionary,” shows his uncertainty. It concludes with a concession: “And even

when he wanders in the shades. *ast tenet umbra Deum*"--even the shadow holds God (CM 1: 558). Nevertheless, Coleridge tried to keep the two supernatural agencies of imagination separate from one another. Under the agency of the witching imagination, as his "ghost-theory" and many of his notes seek to maintain, the projector-percipient takes the creation of his own "fevered" mind for reality.

This effort to divide delusion from intuition and revelation was not a response to his reading only. According to his own definition, Coleridge was often subject to the witching time: the reveries and nightmares for which he is famous were more than bad dreams. Carl Woodring insists that Coleridge was "no visionary" and "would have been greatly surprised if he had, when awake, seen St. Paul either in a bed or at the window," as he had just seen him in a dream (79). But just because he did not believe visitations were genuinely Supernatural does not mean he never experienced the type of dream that he thought men like Böhme and Luther had wrongly interpreted. Coleridge was no stranger to the "sense of the Presence of a Person in our dreams" (CN 2: 2543 [1805]), or the alarming sense of touch and force of will external and contrary to our own. In a passage that Woodring himself cites, Coleridge records

a completed Night-mair, as it gave the *idea* and *sensation* of actual grasp or touch contrary to *my* will, & in apparent consequence of the malignant will of the external Form, actually appearing or (as sometimes happens) believed to exist/ in which latter case tho' I have two or three times felt a horrid *touch* of Hatred, a *grasp*, or a *weight*, of Hate and Horror abstracted from all (Conscious) form or supposal of Form/ an *abstract touch*/ an *abstract* grasp--an *abstract* weight! (CN 2: 2468).

From this Woodring reasons that Coleridge distinguished between "sweet dreams" and nightmares by the latter's thwarting of the dreamer's will. But, as accurate as this distinction is, it does not go far enough. The term "night-mair" cannot be fully defined without reference to the state of consciousness in which "dream" content assumes "reality." A notebook entry of 1811 stresses this dual element of "night-mair":

Night-mair is, I think, always--even when it occurs in the midst of Sleep, and not as it more commonly does after a waking Interval, a state not of Sleep but of Stupor of the outward organs of Sense . . . . This stupor seems occasioned by some painful sensation . . . to which the Imagination therefore, the true inward Creatrix, instantly out of the chaos of the elements <or shattered fragments> of Memory puts together some form to fit it--which derives an over-powering sense of Reality from the circumstance, that the power of Reason being in good measure awake, most generally presents to us all the accompanying images ~~exactly~~ as we very nearly as they existed the moment before, when we fell out of anxious wakefulness into this *Reverie*-- . . . .

Last night . . . a claw-like talon-nailed Hand grasped hold of me, interposed between the curtains . . . .

In short, this Night-mair is not properly *a Dream*; but a species of Reverie . . . . (CN 3: 4046)

Nightmares are contrary to the dreamer's will, but that contrariness seems to come from an external source and is impressed upon the dreamer with all the force of sense perception. Coleridge specifies that outness occurs in a state of reverie which is

neither waking nor sleeping. This is the space where Coleridge saw his demons and angels as a child, and the state to which More attributed accounts of supernatural visitation. Even the knowledge that one is dreaming does not alter the sense of outness:

Saturday Night. at M<sup>r</sup> Butler's at Ridding--the Nightmair--so near  
awaking and my saying--Yes! Dreams. or Creatures of my Dreams. you  
may make me feel you as if you were keeping behind me/but you cannot  
speak to me--immediately I heard impressed on my outward ears. & with  
a perfect sense of *distance* answered--O yes! but I can-- (CN 3: 3984)

But the witching imagination was responsible for more than voices, taloned hands, or the touch and weight of invisible presences. Coleridge publicly claimed that he had seen ghosts. To his "ghost-theory" in *The Friend* he adds personal testimony: "A lady once asked me if I believed in ghosts and apparitions. I answered with truth and simplicity: No, Madam! I have seen far too many myself" (1: 146). Coleridge apparently repeated this statement in his 1818 lecture on apparitions. It was, as R. A. Foakes points out in his headnote, familiar enough for Thomas Love Peacock to exploit it in *Nightmare Abbey* (LL 2: 197). Peacock's Mr. Flosky holds forth on his spectral encounters:

*Mr. Flosky:* I can safely say I have seen too many ghosts myself to believe in their external existence. I have seen all kinds of ghosts: black spirits and white, red spirits and grey. Some in the shapes of venerable old men, who have met me in my rambles at noon; some of beautiful young women, who have peeped through my curtains at midnight.

*Hon. Mr. Listless:* And have proved, I doubt not, "palpable to feeling

as to sight.”

*Mr. Flosky:* By no means, sir. . . . genuine untangible ghosts. I live in a world of ghosts. I see a ghost at this moment. (Peacock 181)

As ludicrous as Peacock makes it sound, Coleridge’s forthright confession is borne out by a notebook entry of 1805. Coleridge records how he saw an apparition of a person who had just left the room:

he and I having conversed for a long time / he bade me good night, and retired--I meaning to retire too however sunk for 5 minutes or so into a Doze, and on suddenly waking up I saw him as distinctly sitting in the chair, as I had seen him really some ten minutes before . . . . --Often and often I have had similar Experiences / ~~but~~ and therefore resolved to write down the Particulars whenever ~~they~~ any new instance should occur / as . . . an explanation of *Ghosts* . . . . (CN 2: 2583)

Coleridge goes on in this entry to speculate that the encounters and apparitions of visionaries were no different than his. Indeed, he records the very conversation on ghosts that he later includes in *The Friend* and in his lecture.

Although Coleridge’s experiences lead him to believe that ghosts are definitely not visitants from the spirit world, his reports might make one reconsider whether the “spectres” from *The Arabian Nights* that haunted him as a child had “real” outness after all--especially since he says he “brooded” over the tales. This word itself suggests a special and habitual kind of concentration on a text which in turn suggests a propensity to disengage from the sensory environment of everyday reality. Julian Silverman, in a study on altered states of consciousness, comments on this propensity among “sensitive”

personalities. Often identified as introverts, sensitive individuals “are marked by higher levels of nervous system excitation (or *arousal*)” than extroverts and are “more easily aroused by low intensity stimulation” (303). He cites studies to show that this difference in responsiveness corresponds with a difference in “orientation” to the “environment”:

Sensitive individuals appear disposed to withdraw attention easily from their immediate environment and attend instead to internal states; they tend to be more self-absorbed, contemplative and introspective, more capable of relaxing a reality-attuned orientation. In contrast, individuals less sensitive to low intensity stimulation appear more dependent on external stimulation and tend to seek it out; they are primarily oriented outward to the external environment, toward the “real” world. (303)

These differences in “sensory responsiveness,” furthermore, manifest themselves very early: “they are associated, from childhood on, with such cognitive traits as imaginativeness and depth of fantasy life” (303). Such individuals may be more susceptible to altered states of consciousness and the “impressive experiences” that come with them than “reality-oriented” people (304).

Coleridge certainly paints a portrait of himself as just such a personality. A child dreamer, he moped and brooded, suddenly leaping up and acting out stories in a rush of spirits; he was haunted by spectres in the dark; he “brooded” at school, as he recalls in “Frost at Midnight,” withdrawing his attention from his “swimming book” and concentrating so intently on absent friends that he expected to see one walk through the door (ll. 34-43; *PW* 1: 241-42). The power of *The Arabian Nights* lingers on into

adulthood as Coleridge continues to suffer terrifyingly corporeal dreams informed by his reading of the tales:

Friday Night, Nov. 28. 1800. or rather Saturday Morning--a most frightful Dream of a Woman whose features were blended with darkness catching hold of my right eye & attempting to pull it out--I caught hold of her arm fast--a horrid feel-- . . . the Woman's name Ebon Ebon Thalud--When ~~my~~ I awoke, my right eyelid swelled-- (CN 1: 848 and n).

In 1802 he describes himself to Godwin as suffering from "an unhealthy & reverie-like vividness of *Thoughts*. & . . . a diminished Impressibility from *Things*" (CL 2: 782).

Significantly, Coleridge's description of St. Teresa of Avila harmonizes both with Silverman's characterization of the "sensitive" personality and with Coleridge's portrait of himself in his autobiographical letters. In childhood she read legends and tales of chivalry "all night to herself"; she possessed a "frame of exquisite sensibility by nature" as well as a "heated" imagination (LR 4: 68-69; [1812]). These factors, in Coleridge's opinion, contributed to her visionary experiences. Coleridge not only exhibits but seems to have been aware of the personality traits that create a susceptibility to supernatural experiences. Whatever the status of the childhood spectres of *The Arabian Nights*, whether merely "imaginary" or externalized images, his general claim to have seen ghosts is consistent with these traits, and we should take it seriously.

When we do, there arises the question of just how seriously Coleridge himself took these realities of imagination. His theory and Hollenback's, similar though they are, seem to differ not only on the division of divine from delusional experiences, but

on the ontological status of the concretized images encountered in the spectral realm. In his ghost-theory, Coleridge qualifies the concretization that takes place during the witching time: Luther's Devil "acquired *apparent* outness"; the evil beings were real "in *his* apprehension"; he was "possessed with them, *as* with substances distinct from himself" (my emphases). Coleridge implies that the translation of thought into thing is a subjective phenomenon. Hollenback, on the other hand, asserts that the "hallucinations" produced by the empowered imagination are not necessarily

purely subjective phenomena or mere fantasies; they may actually possess an objective or at least quasi-objective presence. . . . [S]ome creations of the empowered mind possess an ontological dignity midway between that inferior status one accords those evanescent, "unreal," purely subjective phantasms that result from our ordinary dreams and imaginings and that superior ontological status one unquestioningly accords to the "real" objects that one encounters in the physical world. (288)

Ghosts and poltergeists, for instance, are not simply "brain-images" that acquire "apparent outness" but "exteriorization phenomena" resulting from "ex-stasis."

Hollenback uses the term "ex-stasis" in order to distinguish the "etymological sense of ecstasy" from its more familiar association with mystical "bliss," a state in which the subject often "loses awareness of both his or her physical environment and body" (136-7). "Ex-stasis," in contrast, denotes

that sensation or feeling that mystics, psychics, mediums, and other specialists in the paranormal often have of literally seeming to stand outside of themselves as though they were looking at their bodies from a



vantage point exterior to it. In ex-stasis either a part or all of the subject's consciousness-principle, usually conceptualized as the "soul" or "spirit," separates from the physical body and it is this disembodied soul-substance or spirit-substance that is reputed to be the agency that performs deeds or perceives things that are otherwise impossible while one is in the ordinary waking state subject to the normal limitations of the physical body. (137)

Twentieth-century names for the phenomenon include "astral projection," "bilocation," "out-of-body experience," and "autoscopic hallucination" (137).

The separated consciousness generates a variety of "exteriorization phenomena" that "lie along a continuum" (149). Hollenback places controlled journeys of "ethereal" or "quasi-material" bodies at the top as the "most developed" form. Doppelgängers and "asomatic" exteriorizations lower down, and ghosts and poltergeists which the projector is unaware of having projected at the bottom (147-49). Hollenback believes that during ex-stasis, which is a product of empowerment, the imagination can become an organ of "perception" and "locomotion," able to acquire knowledge not otherwise available to it (21, 158).

Hollenback's discussion of ex-stasis may seem to go far beyond anything Coleridge entertained, especially if we compare only ghost-theory with ghost-theory. But *The Statesman's Manual* contains a passage that suggests otherwise. Here Coleridge muses on the "dreams" that accompany certain states.

--States, of which it would be scarcely too bold to say that we *dream the things themselves*; so exact, minute, and vivid beyond all power of

ordinary memory is the portraiture. so marvellously perfect is our brief metempsychosis into the very *being*. as it were. of the person who seems to address us. (*LS* 80)

Coleridge duly qualifies his use of "metempsychosis" with "as it were" and "seems"--*The Statesman's Manual* was, after all, written for publication. But his description suggests that he experienced the sense of ex-stasis and exteriorization, though he hesitates to accept it as actual fact.

In an unpublished notebook entry of 1827 he further considers soul-related possibilities that might follow from a "magnetic trance":

For instance. assuming the truth of the case attested by Wienholt < that the patient had not deceived him > , and that neither he nor his Patient had deceived himself. [?or/if/of] the female Clairvoyant who in her own [. . .] sleep or rather Desensuation recollected accurately every thing that had taken place both within herself. and all that had been done and said by others. during her fainting fits. in which she lay to all appearance utterly senseless. and all of which she was entirely unconscious in her coming to life again. Could this fact. if a *Fact*, . . . admit of any other solution. but that of the Soul. = principium individualities. or substantial person capable < if not > of existing separately from the body. yet of perceiving. remembering. and thinking independently of the bodily organs of Sense. Memory & Thought--i.e. [?from] the Senses? . . . (qtd. Ford 107)

This entry shows Coleridge stopping just short of hypothesizing ex-stasis of the soul or

consciousness-principle. Indeed, given the difficulties in legibility reflected by the transcription, one cannot definitively say that he does stop short. At the very least, Coleridge does consider the possibility that in certain states the soul may have powers of movement and knowledge that transcend the limitations of the body.

Nor was such speculation confined to his later years. At the age of twenty-four he confessed in his notebook.

One of the strangest and most painful Peculiarities of my Nature  
(unless others have the same, & like me, hide it from the same  
inexplicable feeling of causeless shame & sense of a sort of guilt, joined  
with the apprehension of being feared and shrunk from as a something  
transnatural) I will here record-- . . .

It consists in a sudden second sight of some hidden Vice, past,  
present, or to come, of the person or persons with whom I am about to  
form a close intimacy-- . . . . I see it as a Vision, feel it as a Prophecy--  
not as one *given* me by any other Being, but as an act of my own Spirit,  
of the absolute Noumenon/ which in doing so seems to have offended  
against some Law of its Being, & to have acted the Traitor by a  
commune with full Consciousness independent of the tenure or inflicted  
state of Association, Cause & Effect &c &c-- (CN 3: 4166 and 4167)

Coleridge fears that these acts of his "*Εγὼ νοῦμενος* [spirit self]" may break a pact originally made by all the *noumena*, "each to forbid himself to be conscious of another's acts except thro' the senses." By breaking this law, he may be "invading the free will & rightful secrecy of a fellow-spirit."

The extent to which mind, spirit, and imagination could act independently of--or on--the corporeal dimension was a problem that Coleridge struggled with despite his frequent qualifications. Not without reason does he say in the *Biographia* that "matter, spirit, soul, body, action, passiveness, time, space, cause and effect, consciousness, perception, memory and habit" are "difficulties" rather than "facts" (1: 234-35). The extent to which imagination could actually project and create reality was one of these difficulties. Coleridge's most sustained engagement with it occurs in the supernatural poems, but it appears elsewhere in his writing as well.

One of the supernatural poems, "Kubla Khan," is made "autobiographical" by its preface. Coleridge's most explicit public claim to a visionary experience. The preface, over which so much ink has been shed, has perhaps never been taken literally enough. Exact dates, locations, and the possession of *Purchas His Pilgrimage* aside, Coleridge's account becomes quite reliable when considered within the context of the "empowered" or "Creative" or "witching" imagination discussed in this chapter. In fact, when taken literally, the preface becomes paradigmatic of the witching imagination's power to create through the concretization of thought. The notorious "anodyne" of opium should not distract our attention from other features of the experience. Alethea Hayter points out that at this time in his life the drug produced "repose," as Coleridge himself stated in a letter (CL 1: 394), and a "freedom from anxiety, a vague sense of happiness" (216). It could have aided the shift into the hypnagogic state.

The pertinent "facts," then, as Coleridge gives them in the preface are these: alone and undisturbed in a remote farmhouse, he took an "anodyne"; he drifted into a

"sleep" of the "external senses" with his mind fixed on Kubla Khan and Xanadu; he saw images rise up before him as *things*; he awoke, began writing, suffered an interruption (the legendary person from Porlock), and lost the vividness of the vision (PW 1: 296). The importance of Purchas is not so much whether Coleridge had the large folio sitting on his lap at the time (as he implies), but rather that his mind was focused on one idea or image. Having achieved an empowered or witching state, Coleridge hints, he did not merely "compose" a vivid poem, but created and visited Xanadu as a quasi-material realm simply by thinking it.

The ability to create a dream-locale, to concretize one's thoughts of another location, is in Hollenback's theory a feature of empowerment. It is also a feature of certain kinds of ex-stasis.<sup>3</sup> Although Coleridge says nothing in the preface about leaving or seeming to leave his body, other aspects of his Xanadu experience parallel aspects of Robert Monroe's *Journeys Out of the Body*, upon which Hollenback relies extensively in his discussion of ex-stasis.<sup>4</sup> As Hollenback relates, most of Monroe's travels occurred during the hypnagogic state. Though early episodes were spontaneous and unsought, and caused Monroe considerable distress, he learned to induce this state intentionally and to control his thought processes at least some of the time, thereby

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<sup>3</sup>Hollenback argues that the data on out-of-body travel suggest that the "empowerment or 'dynamization' of thought, will, and imagination actually precedes exteriorization rather than being its result" (172). Ex-stasis, in other words, and the various phenomena that may accompany it, are products of empowerment.

<sup>4</sup>This reliance on Monroe is for Merkur one of the most objectionable features of Hollenback's work. It is true that the "evidence" Monroe's *Journeys* offers is of the purely anecdotal variety. But Monroe's experiences, and Hollenback's explanations, do help us see the preface to "Kubla Khan" in a new light. The parallels between Monroe's "journeys" and Coleridge's "vision," whatever their ontological status, reveal an exploration of intermediate dimensions that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

controlling his journeys (Hollenback 146, 151-52). Monroe suggests that the key to achieving the state of consciousness in which out-of-body travel occurs begins with relaxation. One must begin by clearing away anxieties and any "pending appointments" (Monroe 207). Deep concentration is needed to prevent the subject from falling into ordinary sleep. To maintain "consciousness"--or intentionality, as James J. Donahoe calls it--Monroe instructs the beginner to focus attention on something while falling "asleep."<sup>5</sup> The resulting "deepening consciousness" shuts down sensory input. As one goes deeper into this "sleep," one must continue to maintain control over one's will and thought processes (Monroe 208-09). As Hollenback summarizes from Monroe's experiences, relaxation and deepening focus induce catalepsy, during which the dissociation of "both the consciousness-principle and the quasi-material duplicate body from the physical body" occur (Hollenback 146). This second body is then free to travel through experiential domains that Monroe calls "Locales."

Of particular interest to Hollenback and to us is the fact that during Monroe's ex-stasis, thinking becomes doing. In Locale I (the "Here-Now") you simply "think of a person at the end of your destination . . . . In a few moments, you are there" (62).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Donahoe uses a slightly different vocabulary for similar "paranormal" experiences. He explains that "intentionality" is the key to creating "dreams" that transcend the usual sense of that word. He coins the evocative name "dream reality" for those experiences--from "lucid dreaming" to out-of-body travel--that fall between the poles of our everyday binary categories.

<sup>6</sup>Monroe describes Locale I as the "most believable" because it "consists of people and places that actually do exist in the material, well-known world at the very moment of the experiment. It is the world represented to us by our physical senses which most of us are fairly sure does exist" (60). In other words, it is the domain of the physical body, but the "Second Body" can travel through it rapidly, free of physical limitations. Such, Monroe might conclude, was the travel through the air that the witch in More's account experienced, while More and others watched her sleeping.

As Hollenback says, ex-stasis entails "the preternatural enhancement of thought and will" (151). Empowerment enables ex-stasis, but also makes "navigation" very difficult and the control of one's thoughts extremely important. The slightest shift in thought or mood can project the second body into "an experiential domain structured in accordance with one's 'concretized' thoughts, desires, and emotions--both conscious and unconscious" (Hollenback 152). Monroe calls this domain *Locale II*. This is the realm in which most out-of-body journeys take place, and it bears no resemblance to our material environment (Monroe 75-76). For, as Monroe explains,

Superseding all appears to be one prime law. *Locale II* is the state of being where that which we label thought is the wellspring of existence. It is the vital creative force that produces energy, assembles "matter" into form . . . . (Monroe 74)

Whether Coleridge's creation of *Xanadu* was a deliberate experiment or a spontaneous and undirected projection of empowered thought cannot be determined from his preface. But the lonely farm house removed from distractions, the relaxation, the mental focus, the shift into the hypnagogic state, the conversion of thought into things, all parallel Monroe's account and Hollenback's explication. Nor is the preface to "*Kubla Khan*" the only indication of such experiences in Coleridge's life. A notebook entry of February 1800 suggests that Coleridge was indeed experimenting with the deliberate creation of dream realities or locales. He writes, "To have a continued Dream, representing visually and audibly all Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (CN 1: 658). The editor remarks that the first word is unclear and could be "I," which would make better sense, but unfortunately it looks more like "to." In the light of the empowered

imagination, however. "to" makes perfect sense, since it conveys intention.

In another entry, Coleridge records a slightly different experiment:

On Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1808. I had a fact of Vision/I was thinking of something introversively and gazed meantime on the wall, over a chest of Drawers, close to the Wall & close by the Bed's head, so that between the Bed & the Wall there was not so much as a foot; & between the Chest of Drawers and the Wall not more than three Inches. On the Chest of Drawers was a Lookingness [*sic*]--*touching* it on the left (*facing* the C. of Drawers) the Curtains of the Bed at its *pillow-part*/on the right, within a foot & a half a window. The wall was papered. & . . . as I gazed the marks on the paper grew not only *larger*, but far more *vivid*, all increased & the distance between the bed & wall, & Chest of Drawers & Wall became such that a pair of Friends might walk arm in arm in the Interstice.--

As I gazed at this, I again voluntarily threw myself into introversive Reflections, & again produced the same Enlargement of Shapes & Distances and the same increase of vividness . . . . [I]n my second & voluntary production of this Vision I retained it as long as I like [*sic*], nay, *bent over* with my body, & looked down into the wide Interspace between the Bed & Chest of Drawers, & the papered Wall, without destroying the Delusion . . . . (CN 3: 3280)

Here Coleridge is experimenting with restructuring Locale I. In the case of Xanadu and Milton's paradise, he constructs, or wishes to construct, a Locale II in accord with his



thoughts, themselves shaped by his reading and empowered through altered consciousness.

Hayter rightly insists, therefore, that the dream at the heart of "Kubla Khan" is neither a dream of ordinary sleep, nor an ordinary daydream (215, 365 n132). She stresses the hypnagogic imagery contained in the poem and notes that we all create and perceive vivid images during the hypnagogic state. The difference between ours and Coleridge's, she suggests, is that his was prolonged by opium and augmented by his great learning. But Hayter fails to go beyond the vividness of the imagery in reverie to its outness--to the concretization that Coleridge hints at in the divine fiat of the Khan's creative decree and embeds in the Bard's own reference to "building" the dome in air.<sup>7</sup>

Although Coleridge usually labels the visions of the witching time as "delusion," the term does not signify a mere figment of imagination, but a temporary disintegration of the boundaries between the real and imaginary that we depend on for everyday life. Repeated experience of the spectral realm may begin to suggest that these boundaries are at least as subjective as the concretizations that transgress them. The witching imagination creates, bestowing substance on the mind's images in a much more concrete sense than we would ever likely attach to Coleridge's three powers as he defines them. While the primary imagination enables meaningful perception, and the secondary imagination dissolves and re-creates (or perhaps as Tolkien would say, "sub-creates"), and the fancy rearranges the fixities available to it through memory, the witching imagination assimilates all these functions and propels them into a new dimension. If

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<sup>7</sup>The relationship between the preface and the poem will be discussed in Part IV (B), "The Reification of Xanadu."

one may associate the secondary imagination, which can create “that which has no analog in the natural world” (Engell 344), with Tolkien’s secondary world, a sub-creation that exists only in the mind, then the witching imagination can be said to create a realm that lies between the primary world created by God and the secondary world created by human fantasy.

In a notebook entry of 1809, Coleridge agonizes over the “strange Self-power in the Imagination” to give external existence to thought. Cryptic though it is, this entry reveals the experiential force of the imagination’s creative energy:

Strange Self-power in the Imagination, when painful sensations have made it their Interpreter, . . . strange power to represent the events & circumstances even to the Anguish or the triumph of the *quasi*-credent Soul, while the necessary conditions, the only possible causes of such contingencies are known to be impossible or hopeless . . .--yet the effect shall have *place & Substance & living energy*, & ð on a blue Islet of Ether in a whole Sky of blackest Cloudage shine, like a firstling of creation.--That dreadful Saturday Morning, . . . I *knew* the horrid phantasm to be a mere phantasm: and yet what anguish, what gnawings of despair, what throbbings and lincinations of positive Jealousy! (CN 3: 3547)

Holmes remarks that the events to which Coleridge refers in this entry are “difficult to reconstruct” (*Reflections* 83). By piecing together other notebook references to that “Saturday Morning” at Coleorton, he speculates that on October 27th, 1806, Coleridge either saw or thought he saw Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson “in bed together” (83-

84). Coleridge's many subsequent and distraught notes on the event show him vacillating between accepting it as real and explaining it away as a "horrid phantasm." Holmes observes that "Coleridge himself never seemed to be quite sure" whether the "scene" was real or not (84).

The witching imagination quite literally allows us to have it both ways. The creatrix bestowed place, substance, and energy on Coleridge's inmost fears. Though he tried to dismiss the vision as subjective fantasy, he could never do so decisively because the experience was too real. As in the preface to "Kubla Khan," his thoughts rose up before him as things. In this particular entry, Coleridge goes on to extrapolate that his desires will also become fact:

Sweet Hartley! What did he say, speaking of some Tale & wild Fancy of his Brain?--"It is not yet, but it will be--for it *is*--& it cannot stay always, *in here*" (*pressing one hand on his forehead and the other on his occiput*)--"and then *it will be*--because it is not nothing." (CN 3: 3547)

Then follows "O wife thou art! O wife thou *wilt be*!" in Greek code (as deciphered in Holmes 178). Coleridge is convinced, at this moment, that what he imagines--his marriage to Sara Hutchinson--must become fact. The passage ends with the exclamation "like some *απατηρ κἀμητηρ* [fatherless and motherless] Offspring of an almighty FIAT!" Linked to Hartley's words by an asterisk, it reiterates the theme of the entire passage: the literal reification of thought. Coleridge's word play linking *res* and *reor*, *Ding* and *denken*, thing and think, suddenly acquires a distinctly personal and disquieting resonance (CN 2: 2784).

In her commentary on the "FIAT" entry, Coburn says that it reveals Coleridge's

“self-awareness of conflicts, irrationalities, and gradations in his sense of reality” (*CN* 3: 3547n). But Corbin or Hollenback or Monroe might well say that it shows Coleridge’s awareness of the gradations or dimensions of reality itself. It is an awareness reflected also in his despairing conclusion of 1805: “Thought and Reality two distinct corresponding Sounds, of which no man can say positively which is the ~~Sound~~ Voice and which the Echo” (*CN* 2: 2557). Coleridge was no stranger to shifts and dislocations in the surface of reality, no stranger to the spectral realm. He experienced a power of imagination that could undermine the opposition of dream/reality, or thought/reality, as experientially valid.

Just such an instability is depicted in the remarkable poem “Phantom or Fact” (1830) with its hesitation between a “life of dreams” and “dream of life.” Significantly, the poem portrays an encounter that might itself be taken as an instance of ex-stasis. As described, the event occupies the middle range of Hollenback’s continuum, where the dissociated “spirit-substance” may take the form of a Doppelgänger able to communicate with a consciousness still associated with the physical body (137, 147-48):

AUTHOR

A LOVELY form there sate beside my bed,  
And such a feeding calm its presence shed.  
A tender love so pure from earthly leaven,  
That I unneth the fancy might control.  
’Twas my own spirit newly come from heaven,  
Wooing its gentle way into my soul!

But ah! the change--It had not stirr'd, and yet--  
Alas! that change how fain would I forget!  
That shrinking back, like one that had mistook!  
That weary, wandering, disavowing look!  
'Twas all another, feature, look, and frame,  
And still, methought, I knew, it was the same!

FRIEND

This riddling tale, to what does it belong?  
Is't history? vision? or an idle song?  
Or rather say at once, within what space  
Of time this wild disastrous change took place?

AUTHOR

Call it a moment's work (and such it seems)  
This tale's a fragment from the life of dreams;  
But say, that years matur'd the silent strife,  
And 'tis a record from the dream of life. (*PW* 1: 484-85)

Well might Coleridge say near the end of his life that "reality is a thing of degrees, from the Iliad to a dream . . ." (*TT* 2: 296). The rationalist categories of real and imaginary did not fit his experience. They not only passed over Bright Reality but also failed to accommodate the dream realities of the spectral realm. "Phantom or Fact" expresses the collapse of those categories, but Coleridge's poetic treatment of it

began much earlier in the supernatural poems. They were the laboratory in which he explored the creative and dislocating power of the witching imagination.

## PART III

***Rewriting Mystery and Visitation:***

***The Acts of the Witching Imagination***

## The “Corporific” Mind of the Ancient Mariner

In “The Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge seems to be as guilty of displacing supernatural events to a pre-enlightened world as writers of Gothic or romance. Peacock includes Coleridge in his list of poets who are “wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance”:

Mr. Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border.  
Lord Byron cruises for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and  
among the Greek islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous  
volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all  
that is false, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical; and when  
he has a commonplace book full of monstrosities, strings them into an  
epic. Mr. Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and  
sextons, and Mr. Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from  
similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians and the  
mysticisms of German metaphysics, and favours the world with visions in  
verse . . . . (“Four Ages” 16).

Peacock’s accusations are not unfounded. The archaic spellings of the 1798 edition of “The Ancient Mariner” combined with the pre-Magellan time frame remove the narrative from contemporary reality. The Mariner’s Catholicism and superstition



remove it from the world of rational Protestantism. The ballad style, metre, and rhyme would all have been familiar to the reading public as imitative of the “reliques” popularized by Percy’s volumes and would have acted as a formal device of displacement, just as they are intended to do in Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. As Peacock says, in “scene” and “time” the events of “The Ancient Mariner” are “remote from our ordinary perceptions” (15). But, despite this apparent displacement of his tale of wonders to the past, Coleridge subverts the us/them, real/not real binaries integral to the readerly tourism of the antiquarian fantastic.

Coleridge’s very adaptation of the ballad form helps to produce a strangely unmapped narrative. Although the events of “The Ancient Mariner” occur well before the Enlightenment, Coleridge does not provide the reader with a vantage point outside (or above) the Mariner’s world. Third-person narration is extremely limited in this poem; like Odysseus, the Mariner tells his own story of “the strange things that befell” in uncharted seas. Once the teller-listener relationship between the Mariner and the Wedding Guest is established, the narrator drops entirely from view and does not reappear until the Mariner has completed his tale. On this strategy, Albert B. Friedman remarks:

The importance of the dramatic framework to “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” indicates how unlike the ballads in radical respects a poem can be and yet rightly convince us that without the ballads it could not have been conceived. Coleridge’s importunate mariner is more completely outfitted with special feelings and mental experiences than any ballad personage, and in order to present him, or let him present himself

thus fully. Coleridge has entirely sacrificed ballad impersonality.

(277-78)

But Coleridge has not *entirely* sacrificed ballad impersonality; he has retained it to the extent that it keeps the author "far in the background," as G. Malcolm Laws puts it (59). Third-person narration, which Radcliffe and Lewis use to establish their own eighteenth-century perspectives, is in "The Ancient Mariner" not only extremely limited, but, more importantly, offers no editorial comment. Nowhere does the narrator discourse upon the Mariner's superstitious tendencies or their causes. As Huntington Brown argues in his classic essay, the narrator, or "minstrel," is himself an inhabitant of an earlier time, pre-dating Shakespeare (319-20).

Coleridge "imitates" other features of the ballad to foreground the Mariner's psychological state. In his deployment of repetition, he has, as Friedman says, "outdone the ballads on their own terms" (279). Friedman cites as one affecting example, the Mariner's lament:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

Alone on a wide, wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony.

Thus, although Friedman himself asserts that Coleridge borrows from traditional supernatural ballads "the remote twilight atmosphere of the Middle Ages, thereby distancing the adventures of the ancient mariner" (284), Coleridge works to bring the Mariner's adventures up close, has the Mariner speak into the very ear of the reader as much as to the Wedding-guest.

In addition to letting the Mariner speak poignantly for himself within the text of the poem, Coleridge increases the immediacy of his narrative by withholding information from outside the text. He resists the fashion of providing an eighteenth-century perspective through historicizing (and legitimizing) prefaces or annotations. The arguments of the 1798 and the 1800 editions offer no information on the relationship of the narrated events to "reality," social or otherwise. They say nothing about events that may have actually happened or were at one time believed possible by the "vulgar." Even the passage from Burnet and the much-discussed gloss frustrate any expectation of factual explanation. The passage from Burnet suggests that invisible beings do exist and thus seems to confirm the Mariner's testimony. The gloss, from which a reader might hope to gain reliable information, clarifies some of the action but never conspires with the "enlightened" reader against, or above the heads of, the characters represented in the poem. As Brown has shown, the scholiast is a "bookish antiquarian" dating to the mid-seventeenth century, at the latest, with beliefs and perspectives of his own (320-22).

Lowes has painstakingly shown that Coleridge's supernatural machinery and descriptive diction sprang from a myriad of sources. Even if some were unconscious borrowings, as Lowes argues, Coleridge could surely have indicated many of his sources and provided legitimization for his departures from reality had he wished to do so. He did just this in his headnote to the "Song of the Pixies" (1793):

The Pixies, in the superstition of Devonshire, are a race of beings invisibly small, and harmless or friendly to man. At a small distance from a village in that county, half-way up a wood-covered hill, is an

excavation called Pixies' Parlour. The roots of old trees form its ceiling

. . . . .

To this place the Author, during the summer months of the year 1793, conducted a party of young ladies; one of whom, of stature elegantly small, and of complexion colourless yet clear, was proclaimed the Faery Queen. On which occasion the following Irregular Ode was written. (*PW* 1: 40)

Coleridge here instructs the reader to regard the poem as an exercise in make-believe inspired by an existing superstition. The fantasy that follows is explicitly grounded in someone else's belief.

"The Ancient Mariner," on the other hand, lacks any such orienting device because in it Coleridge attempts something new. Peacock says that Coleridge added the visions of mystics and "crazy theologians" to the contemporary poetic mix of antiquated "rubbish." But in "The Ancient Mariner" Coleridge does not simply "add" visions; he rewrites visions and visitations in accordance with his knowledge of the spectral realm. This revision constitutes his single greatest departure from, and response to, the displaced and caricatured supernaturalism of contemporary "Gothic" romance. Rather than reconstructing the Dark Ages in order to exploit sensational otherworldly intrusions, he takes up and examines the enigma of visitation that rationalists dismiss by locating it in the past. In "The Ancient Mariner," Coleridge presents supernatural phenomena as acts of the witching imagination. He carefully establishes the Mariner's supernatural experiences as projections of his own mind by revealing in them three features of the witching imagination's agency: first, the visitations coincide with shifts

in consciousness; second, the figures are informed by the Mariner's emotional and psychological state; and, third, the images of his subjective universe coalesce with perceptions of his external environment. But Coleridge's treatment of the supernatural does not end in demystification, for the Mariner's delusions prove to be efficacious. By having the Mariner's phantoms become fact, Coleridge expresses the power of the witching imagination to undermine the opposition between the real and the imaginary. Ultimately, in this poem, Coleridge neither distances nor dismisses visitation, but problematizes it, revealing a mystery far more disorienting than corporeal intrusion from an otherworld.

The Mariner's first encounter with the supernatural, the appearance of the spectre-bark, occurs after he has shot the albatross and the crew have hung the bird around his neck. Coleridge, as we have seen, insisted that ghosts were projections of imagination attributable to non-normal states of consciousness. In a note in *The Statesman's Manual*, he reiterates this opinion in terms significant to "The Ancient Mariner":

A Ghost is *nonsense*--a contradiction in terms, if it be assumed (as in Ghost-stories it always *is* assumed) to appear to our eyes and be heard by our ears. But may not a departed Spirit act on ~~the~~ an embodied Spirit and thus produce ~~for~~ in the brain a corresponding Appearance, which in proportion to ~~other~~ the vividness of the impression will have apparent *outness*?--My reply is--A Fever can do this--an overdose of Laudanum can do it--why not a Spirit? The difficulty is to shew--why it should be a

Spirit. of which we know nothing--instead of Inflammation. Opium.  
Fright. Momentary Somnolence. and some score of other Agents. with  
which and the operations of which we are familiar--Add. that the  
Beholder of the Ghost (on *this* theory) admits. that he was *not in his*  
*Senses* at the time. (LS 81 n2)

Coleridge provides sufficient alternative causation for the appearance of the spectre-bark by placing it after a period of prolonged physical deprivation. The Mariner recalls. "There passed a weary time. Each throat / Was parched, and glazed each eye" (ll. 143-44; *PW* 1: 192). According to Thomas DeQuincey, Coleridge was planning a poem on delirium around this time. "confounding its own dream-scenery with external things" (145). An interest in delirium certainly informs the poem: Coleridge establishes conditions of exposure and dehydration as the context for the Mariner's otherworldly encounters. Becalmed under the merciless tropic sun. with "water, water. every where. / Nor any drop to drink" (ll. 121-22; *PW* 1: 191). at least one of the mariners might be expected to see "a something in the sky" (l. 148; *PW* 1: 192). Nothing in the Mariner's description of the event requires that we see the "something" as anything other than a hallucination. His words indicate that *he* is the first to perceive the phenomenon: "I beheld"; "I bit my arm. I sucked the blood. / And cried. A sail! a sail!" (ll. 160-1; *PW* 1: 192). The other sailors seem to respond only in imitation:

With throats unslaked. with black lips baked.

Agape they heard me call:

Gramercy! they for joy did grin.

And all at once their breath drew in.

As they were drinking all. (ll. 162-66)

The sail turns out to be, or becomes, the ghost-sail of the spectre-bark.

The Mariner's condition might well suffice to cast the machinery that follows into doubt, but Coleridge stresses the agency of the witching imagination by methodically linking distinct instances of intrusion and interference with distinct shifts in consciousness. When, for instance, the albatross at last falls from the Mariner's neck, he slips into a "gentle sleep" and wakes to a refreshing rain (ll. 295-300; *PW* 1: 198). But his waking consciousness strongly resembles the catalepsy associated with the hypnagogic state. Significantly, the Mariner's inability to move is accompanied by a sense of release from his physical body:

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:

I was so light--almost

I thought that I had died in sleep.

And was a blessed ghost. (ll. 305-8; *PW* 1: 199)

This description not only calls to mind the "flight" of witches during trance-states, as recorded by John Cotta, one of Coleridge's sources, but also parallels Monroe's out-of-body experiences. Monroe, too, found himself frozen by catalepsy just before his "second body" was freed from the laws of materiality. For him, thoughts of becoming lighter and floating upward were part of the process by which he dissociated his consciousness from his physical body.

It is during the Mariner's hypnagogic, even ex-static, condition that further supernatural agents begin to assert themselves. Unaware that he is in a dream-like state, the Mariner remarks with unconscious irony on the animation of the dead men's bodies:

"It had been strange, even in a dream. / To have seen those dead men rise" (ll. 333-34; *PW* 1: 200). The bodies set the sails and steer the ship. "Yet never a breeze up-blew" (l. 336). When the spirits that have animated the bodies leave them, the ship continues to sail on mysteriously:

Yet never a breeze did breathe:

Slowly and smoothly went the ship.

Moved onward from beneath. (ll. 374-76; *PW* 1: 201)

The redundancy of agency itself suggests the illogical causality of a dream world. If the ship moves without the benefit of a breeze, it hardly requires trimmed sails or helmsmen; the Polar Spirit provides all the propulsion and direction necessary.

Previously, this Spirit's presence had only been reported to the Mariner by some of his shipmates who had seen it in dreams (ll. 131-34; *PW* 1: 191). Now it becomes a "fact" of the Mariner's own experience. But, true to Coleridge's method, the agency of the Polar Spirit is revealed to the Mariner by voices he hears while lying in a "fit," another subtle shift within his already semiconscious state.<sup>1</sup> The Mariner even indicates

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony John Harding links the Mariner's voices to a passage in David Cranz's *The History of Greenland*. According to Cranz, any Greenlander who wants to become a shaman must "procure" a spirit "of the elements" to act as his "familiar spirit." To do so, he withdraws to a solitary place and engages in prolonged meditation and fasting until his "imagination grows distracted" and he begins to hallucinate. He begins to call for his spirit to come to him, and if the spirit will not, the man's "soul flies away to fetch him." If the spirit "comes voluntarily, he remains without in the entry" of the shaman's house. There, Cranz reports, "our angekok [shaman] discourses with him about any thing that the Greenlanders want to know. Two different voices are distinctly heard, one as without, another as within. The answer is always dark and intricate" (qtd. Harding 44). Harding remarks that this passage provides "a compelling indication of the Mariner's shamanic origins and perhaps the importance of *his* voices" (44). He, too, asserts that "The Ancient Mariner" as a whole "emerges from



that his hearing is a "trans-sensory" event. The term "trans-sensory" is Hollenback's, and he uses it to denote one of the characteristics of the "mystical mode of consciousness." He observes that "the mystic seems to perceive the objects of his or her visions and locutions by means of some faculty other than the five physical senses" (43). The Mariner does not perceive the voices with his physical sense of hearing at all, but with the ears of his soul as he lies in a trance:

. . . ere my living life returned,

I heard and in my soul discerned

Two voices in the air. (ll. 395-97; *PW* 1: 202 )

The mariner "wakes" from this trance to a grisly scene. He sees the dead men standing on the deck, their eyes glittering in the moonlight. Yet once again his waking state is rendered suspect by his inability to move his eyes (ll. 440-41; *PW* 1: 203).

But the Mariner's visions, though "imaginary," are not arbitrary. The "weary time" that precedes the appearance of the spectre-bark includes a long, unresolved crisis. This crisis has driven the other seamen to impose supernatural significance on natural events, as well as guilt and responsibility on the Mariner for their hardships. The unfolding of the supernatural events conforms to Coleridge's thoughts on superstition. In *The Friend* he concludes that certain superstitious practices spring from a desire for quick solutions, from the general reluctance of human beings to exert "the effort of thought and will" (1: 56-7). Holmes draws our attention to Coleridge's ruminations on superstition during his voyage to Malta in 1804 (*Reflections* 11). Coleridge writes in his

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Coleridge's concern with the validity of trance and other extraordinary mental experiences" (45).

notebook.

In the Mediterranean plying wearily to the Windward off Carthage--a wet foggy oppressive Weather. with the wind impotent or against us!-- And the Capt'n begins to look round for the Jonas in the Fleet. Mem. One advantage of sailing in a *Convoy*. On a single Vessel the Jonas must have been sought out amongst ourselves. . . . Vexation, which in a Sailor's mind is always linked on to Reproach and Anger. makes the Superstitious seek out an Object of his Superstition. that can feel his anger-- . . . What an extensive subject would not superstition form taken in its philos. and most comprehen. sense for that mood of Thought & Feeling which arises out of the having placed our summum bonum (what we think so, I mean) in an absolute Dependence on Powers & Events. over which we have no Controll. (CN 2: 2060)

Coleridge's depiction of these tendencies--to look for quick solutions and to find scapegoats--in "The Ancient Mariner" finds elucidation in the formulations of both Tzvetan Todorov and Tobin Siebers. Todorov, in *The Fantastic*, attributes the invention of supernatural agents to "pan-determinism," a view of the world in which every event must have a discernible cause. "Chance" events, according to this world view, appear to be so only because they are not "directly linked to other causal series controlling our life." In such cases, pan-determinism supplies "supernatural beings [to] compensate for a deficient causality" (110). Siebers, as we have seen in Part I, examines superstition as a mechanism of social relations. He defines it as the tendency among human beings to mark and expel others as different in order to dissolve crisis and

contain violence (*Romantic* 12). In *The Mirror of Medusa* he explains that the logic of superstition compels the group to select an individual and make him or her responsible for the crisis. In doing so, they attribute supernatural power or significance to that person. The “marked” person is then seen as both “sacred” and “accursed.” He or she becomes a scapegoat to be expelled, sometimes even murdered, by the group seeking to restore equilibrium (*Mirror* 20-21). Siebers concurs with Todorov: “the notion of hazard . . . comes late to the human mind. Many primitive societies do not believe in accidents. There, every cause has an effect and, more importantly, every effect has a cause” (*Mirror* 33). In Siebers’ social theory, a selected human being supplies the deficient causality.

Much of the supernatural causality in “The Ancient Mariner” unfolds according to the logic of superstition. The crew, trapped in eerie unknown waters rendered unnavigable by ice, mist, and snow, assign great significance to an ordinary albatross. Whether they assume from the outset that it is an emissary or a “bird of good omen,” as the scholiast calls it, is unclear (*PW* 1: 189). Upon its appearance, overjoyed to find another living creature in their desolate surroundings, they hail it “*as if* it had been a Christian soul” (l. 65; *PW* 1: 189, my emphasis). But, lost in the ice and desperate to find a way out, they soon begin to ascribe special powers to the bird. The Mariner himself seems less ready to do so, at least at first. Coleridge, employing the elliptical technique of the ballad, avoids having the Mariner explicitly state any causal link at all between the bird and the ship’s situation:

It ate the food it ne’er had eat.

And round and round it flew.

The ice did split with a thunder-fit;

The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind:

The Albatross did follow . . . . (ll. 67-72; *PW* 1: 189)

This missing link in the causal chain provides a space for the operation of superstition and allows the reader to see it at work. For, when the Mariner kills the bird, his shipmates fill the gap with the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* of pan-determinism:

And I had done a hellish thing,

And it would work 'em woe:

For all averred, I had killed the bird

That made the breeze to blow. (ll. 91-94; *PW* 1: 190)

But the bird's significance shifts as suddenly as the changing weather as the crew exhibit the tendency of superstitious minds to look for quick solutions:

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,

The glorious Sun uprist:

Then all averred, I had killed the bird

That brought the fog and mist.

'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,

That bring the fog and mist. (ll. 97-102; *PW* 1: 190)

Despite the obvious unreliability of the crew's interpretation of events, many critics have focused, like them, on the cosmic significance of the bird and, consequently, of the Mariner's act. They read the poem as a tale of sin, punishment,

and redemption. Foremost among the “Christian” interpretations, as critics are wont to call them, is Robert Penn Warren’s seminal essay, “A Poem of Pure Imagination.” Warren argues that in “The Ancient Mariner” Coleridge develops two themes. The “primary,” or most obvious, theme is the one “hinted at” in “the outcome of the fable taken at its face value as a story of crime and punishment and reconciliation” ; Warren names it “the theme of the sacramental vision, or . . . of the ‘One Life’” (214). The “secondary” theme is less obvious and is incorporated through a system of symbols that revolves around the sun and the moon: the moon symbolizes the imagination, the sun the “reflective faculty” or understanding (233-36). Because the albatross is associated with “the white Moon-shine,” the crime against the bird operates at the secondary level as a crime against the imagination (239). When the Mariner at last blesses the water-creatures by the light of the moon, “the theme of the sacramental vision and the theme of the imagination are fused” and reconciliation begins (244).

Jerome McGann argues that the long tradition of Christian-symbolist readings evolved from the Higher Critical hermeneutical models that Coleridge followed and deliberately embedded in the poem. Our duty as critics, McGann urges, is not to interpret the symbolism, but to historicize it, to reveal that it and Coleridge’s hermeneutics are a function of his culturally determined “ideological commitments” (64-65). In trying to break away from interpretation to critical skepticism, however, McGann presupposes a reading like Warren’s, asserting that through its “symbolic paraphernalia” (58) the poem “presents us with an obviously ‘Christian’ plot” (61).

Other critics have placed the poem within the political and cultural context at the time of its writing, but the assumption that sin (or crime) and guilt form the narrative’s

core often remains. Peter Kitson, for example, sees in "The Ancient Mariner" Coleridge's loss of hope for social change through political action in the wake of the French Revolution. That the poem grows from an altered perspective on social transformation is a point on which I entirely agree; as I argue in Part IV, Coleridge's "divining" poetics constitutes an effort to bring about change through non-political means. But Kitson accepts a fundamentally symbolist reading. "The mariner," he asserts, "commits a spiritual and symbolic sin when he shoots the benevolent albatross" (206). In this act, "Collective national guilt is conflated with inherent, individual depravity and given a representative form in the mariner himself" (207). The Mariner's redemption, on the other hand, is entirely "individual" and "internal": he must learn to see nature in a way that "leads to love of God" (207). Debbie Lee also takes up the theme of collective guilt, but in her analysis of the poem it is incurred not by the events surrounding the French Revolution but by the slave trade. Already discussed by J. R. Ebbatson and others, the issue of slavery gains new focus as Lee considers its connection with "the material conditions of fever, particularly yellow fever" (677) in history and in the poem.<sup>2</sup> Lee asserts that "the albatross is just one emblem of guilt."

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<sup>2</sup>Ebbatson succinctly proposes that the central act of *The Ancient Mariner*, the shooting of the albatross, may be a symbolic rehearsal of the crux of colonial expansion, the enslavement of native peoples; and that the punishments visited upon the Mariner, and the deaths of his shipmates because of their complicity, may represent European racial guilt, and the need to make restitution. (198) Patrick Keane advances the argument that Coleridge's apparently "apolitical" poem of "guilt, repentance, and continued punishment" is a "covert" response to "maritime expansion" and the slave trade, but also suggests that the poem contains "submerged" indications of Coleridge's "increasingly conservative" political views following the French Revolution (3, 9).

The illness of the crew is another: "If the ship is on a commercial mission, especially one dealing in slaves, Coleridge implies a moral cause for the epidemic" (684). She attributes the crew's desperate thirst and burnt lips to yellow fever and equates the fever with the "spirit that plagued them."<sup>3</sup>

But to see the events that befall the Mariner as the wages of sin, whether individual or collective, cosmic or political, is to assume the superstitious perspective of the crew. Merton A. Christensen and Lionel Stevenson are both nearer the mark when they assert that the narrative is an inside look at a superstitious mind. They, however, leave the crew out of their evaluations, even though the other mariners are first to display superstitious thought.<sup>4</sup> Attributing the natural miseries of the doldrums to an avenging Polar Spirit, the crew fix on the Mariner as the ultimate cause of their suffering. The scholiast shrewdly perceives that their act is an attempt to save themselves by "representing identity as difference," as Siebers would say:

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<sup>3</sup>Fever is important to "The Ancient Mariner," but not as a consequence of immoral action. It is one mechanism that empowers the witching imagination to act. While Lee provides valuable information on the slave trade and Coleridge's--and British society's--responses to it, her materialist analysis depends upon a highly symbolic reading that curiously bypasses the historical period within which Coleridge situates the events of his narrative. In contrast, the distinct epochs represented by the Mariner, the balladist, and the scholiast form the very foundation of McGann's historicist treatment of the poem.

<sup>4</sup>Christensen concludes that Coleridge "has carried us, not to the Pacific Ocean or anywhere else in external reality, but into the mind of an old sailor--superstitious, creative, and obsessed" (158). He attributes the pattern of guilt and redemption to the Mariner's medievalism: "one formalizes with what he has at hand" (159). Stevenson proposes that in his delirium the Mariner "evolves a logical train of events to account for the occurrences, which would otherwise seem to be a cruel whim of fate, and he feels himself set apart forever after as a man of apocalyptic vision . . . ." (41). Neither critic, however, examines the role of superstition in detail. Nor do they recognize that by assigning supernatural intervention to simple superstition and delirium they raise another question: how did the Mariner get home?

The shipmates, in their sore distress, would fain throw the whole guilt on the ancient Mariner: in sign whereof they hang the dead sea-bird round his neck. (*PW* 1: 191)

Making him a scapegoat, they enact Siebers'--and Coleridge's--"logic of superstition." Yet the scholiast himself is an articulate spokesperson for that logic. He accepts the supplied causality of the Polar Spirit as a straightforward fact; it is "one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet" (191). Like the crew, he attributes their crisis to the death of the albatross at the Mariner's hands: "the Albatross begins to be avenged" (191). He distinguishes himself from the crew only by his belief that they made themselves "accomplices in the crime" when they commended the Mariner's act (190). For the scholiast, they are identical to the Mariner because they too are guilty.

Edward E. Bostetter rightly argues that "Christian" critics who accept the scholiast's interpretation of the situation along with the Mariner's "moral tag" are forced to find justice and benevolence in a universe that displays none (245). But one need not fall back on Coleridge's "irrational fears and guilt feelings," as Bostetter does, to explain the forces of the Mariner's universe (251). Nor need one see the sufferings of the crew as expressing Coleridge's sense of his nation's guilt. Coleridge may indeed have been familiar with the psychological forces central to the Mariner's experience, and Kitson, Ebbatson, Keane, and Lee abundantly show that he lamented the evils of the French Revolution and the slave trade. But the Mariner's supernatural universe is presented as the spectral realm; Bostetter fails to take his own title, "The Nightmare World of 'The Ancient Mariner,'" literally enough. However evil or venial the Mariner's shooting of the albatross may be, events that follow say nothing about the



powers of any universe but the Mariner's subjective one. The Mariner and his shipmates are identical not because they have shared in certain crimes, but because they are all ordinary human beings caught in a crisis. The scholiast misinterprets the situation because he accepts supernatural interference in the first place. Readers, like certain anthropologists to whom Siebers refers, may be "taken in" by the group's "false oppositions" that are themselves generated by superstition (*Mirror* 37).

By dramatizing the logic of superstition in the acts of the crew, Coleridge reiterates the "imaginary" nature of the Mariner's supernatural encounters: they figure forth his subjective universe. The Mariner suffers the same physical deprivations as the others, is subject like them to the fear of death and the horror of drifting on an unknown sea. In addition, he suffers the grief and anxiety of being marked and ostracized. He reveals his own propensity for pan-deterministic thinking when he succumbs to his shipmates' interpretation of events. Oppressed by the weight of the albatross, he begins to accept the responsibility his fellows have thrown upon him. His delirium produces not only the sail that every stranded mariner wishes to see, but also a figure of death and judgment. Joy evaporates as the "something" stops behaving like a rescue ship and begins behaving like a creature of dream, freely and ominously defying the laws of nature:

See! See! (I cried) she tacks no more!

Hither to work us weal;

Without a breeze, without a tide,

She steadies with upright keel! (ll.167-70; *PW* 1: 193)

And a figure of nightmare it is. The Mariner, not quite as accustomed to, or as

well-read on. "facts of mind" as his creator, perceives that the ship is an apparition, a "spectre-bark" (l. 202; *PW* 1: 195), but he does not understand that it is the creation of his own fevered imagination. He certainly does not recognize the spectre-crew as objectifications of the guilt he has internalized. In the dice-game, he "hallucinates" the supernatural judgment he fears:

The naked hulk alongside came,

And the twain were casting dice;

"The game is done! I've won! I've won!"

Quoth she, and whistles thrice. (ll. 195-98; *PW* 1: 194)

In accord with his feelings of guilt and the harsh treatment he has received at the hands of his shipmates, he projects an arbitrary judgment at the hands of vindictive beings and imagines for himself a punishment worse than death: a purgatory in which he will suffer endlessly for his sins. Coleridge expresses the relationship between guilt and the agonies of the spectral realm again in a later notebook:

Hell? but whence came the descriptions of its Torments? From the imagination? But who having experienced what can be suffered in distempered Sleep, will compare the imaginative *unsensational* power of the man awake with the imagination that the Soul produces & suffers in Sleep?--One of the most horrible of these states of Morbid Sleep is the Sensation that counterfeits Remorse--& actual Remorse we know, when intense, ~~takes the~~ realizes all the horrors of sleep & seems indeed the identity or co-inherence of Sleep & Wake, Reality and Imagination.--If then Hell mean, & I know no more rational meaning, the state & natural

consequences of a diseased Soul. abandoned to itself or additionally  
tortured by the very organic case which had before sheltered it. and the  
force of the blows & blunted the point and edge of the daggers--it must  
contain--& surpass all the descriptions of Hell. that were portraits of the  
disturbed imagination-- . . . . (CN 4: 4846 [1821-22])

Remorse and "Morbid Sleep" counterfeit each other; they are both in-between,  
nightmare states in which the real and imaginary interpenetrate and become  
indistinguishable. in which conviction of guilt becomes sensation.

The guilt that creates the Nightmare Life-in-Death only grows after the deaths of  
the crew, deaths for which the Mariner believes himself responsible. His guilt is ever  
before him, informing all his perceptions. Phosphorescence and sea serpents become  
indexes of his loathsomeness. The dead men, evidence of his sin, are burned into his  
vision and his conscience:

The many men, so beautiful!  
And they all dead did lie:  
And a thousand thousand slimy things  
Lived on; and so did I.

I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away;  
I looked upon the rotting deck,  
And there the dead men lay.

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.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat;  
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet. (ll. 236-52; *PW* 1: 196-97)

Even after the albatross at last falls from his neck, as Christian's sack of sins falls from his back when he reaches the foot of the cross, the Mariner's penance continues. The voices that reveal to him the Polar Spirit's agency while he lies in a "fit" echo the assumptions and conclusions of the crew: the Mariner committed a crime by killing the bird, and the Polar Spirit pursues him seeking vengeance (ll. 398-409; *PW* 1: 202).

Their close adherence to the Mariner's obsessions undermines the supernatural status of the spectre-crew, the Polar Spirit, and the voices. Like Luther, the Mariner gives form to the thoughts and feelings that possess him (*Friend* 1: 139-40). But the forms are taken for supernatural intruders by both the Mariner and Luther because the witching imagination has the peculiar power to combine subjective with objective environments, giving the subjective *outness*. Natural and "supernatural" inhabit the same space, and the real and the imaginary become indistinguishable. The description Coleridge gives of Charles Lloyd's "Somnambulism" or "frightful Reverie" in 1796

applies equally well to visions of the Mariner: "all the Realities round him mingle with, and form a part of, the strange Dream. All his voluntary powers are suspended; but he perceives every thing & hears every thing, and whatever he perceives & hears he perverts into the substance of his delirious Vision" (*CL* 1: 257). For the Mariner,

The western wave was all a-flame.

The day was well nigh done!

Almost upon the western wave

Rested the broad bright Sun:

When that strange shape drove suddenly

Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars.

(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)

As if through a dungeon-grate he peered

With broad and burning face. (*ll.* 171-80; *PW* 1: 193)

Like Luther's devil, or Coleridge's taloned hand (*CN* 3: 4046), the Mariner's "brain-image" of the spectre-bark is projected onto the external environment which he remembers, or of which he is still in a manner aware, even in his half-waking state. It turns the sun itself into a figure of guilt and punishment, peering through the bars of its prison.<sup>5</sup> The fusion of natural phenomena--the "rotting sea," phosphorescence, St. Elmo's fire--with unnatural appearances indicates not supernatural interference in the

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<sup>5</sup>The image of the dungeon-grate is one of the key figures in Keane's discussion of the poem, since it simultaneously evokes the horrors of a slave ship and the dangers of imprisonment that accompanied radical politics.

natural sphere, but the agency of the witching imagination (*PW* 1: 197-200). In the spectral dimension that blends with "the sea and the sky," the Mariner's guilty imagination preserves the bodies of the dead men:

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,

Nor rot nor reek did they:

The look with which they looked on me

Had never passed away. (ll. 253-56; *PW* 1: 197)

In this dimension, a "troop of spirits blest" is no more or less surprising than the dance of "a hundred fire-flags" (ll. 349, 314; *PW* 1: 200, 199). The Mariner himself, or his dissociated consciousness, moves in the same ghostly space as the animated bodies of his shipmates, a Coleridgean "Locale I" which is the recognizable domain of the physical body, but strangely altered by the imagination: "*They* raised their limbs like lifeless tools-- / *We* were a ghastly crew" (339-40, my emphasis).

The Mariner does eventually reawaken to the natural environment of normal consciousness:

. . . once more

I viewed the ocean green,

And looked far forth, yet little saw

Of what had else been seen-- (ll. 442-45; *PW* 1: 203)

No spirits, no voices, no spectre-barks. But he has experienced the dislocation of the spectral realm and now has an altered sense of reality. He suffers permanent effects of encounter, and describes his new relationship to the waking world by means of a chilling analogy--itself a scene from nightmare:

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. (ll. 446-51; *PW* 1: 203)

The spectral dimension follows him. If he has indeed emerged from his "dream" world of apparitions, the "real" world is now impregnated with their silent, invisible presences. The barriers have dissolved.

Although for the time being he sees nothing, the Mariner soon feels the breath of a physical wind--"It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek"--that nevertheless makes "nor sound nor motion," nor a ripple on the surface of the sea (ll. 452-55; *PW* 1: 204). This breeze brings him home. But now, though he has believed himself awake for much of the journey--now, when he at last beholds the solid buildings and familiar landscape of home--the Mariner fears he may be dreaming:

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed

The light-house top I see?

Is this the hill? is this the kirk?

Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,

And I with sobs did pray--

O let me be awake, my God!

Or let me sleep away. (ll. 464-71; *PW* 1: 204)

Coleridge has worked to establish the Mariner's supernatural experiences as "facts of mind," features of his subjective universe. He has also conveyed the conflation of objective and subjective realms that creates the impression of supernatural visitation, and the fracture in the surface of reality that such an experience creates for the percipient.

But Coleridge goes farther than this. The Mariner's visions cannot be described as "imaginary," if by "imaginary" we mean the opposite of "real." Nor can they be dismissed as "real" only to him. The opposition between the two categories is not always so irreducible. As Coleridge's vision at Coleorton suggests, imagination has the power to cross the boundary: "the effect shall have place & substance & living energy" (*CN* 3: 3547). However difficult it may be to take this statement literally, in "The Ancient Mariner" Coleridge portrays the imagination as having precisely this power to create reality. For the Mariner does not only absorb his external environment into his vision; he projects his creations past the borders of his mental universe to interact with the objective world.

The first intimation that imagination can penetrate reality comes with the spectre-bark. This apparition fulfills all the criteria of a delusion of the witching time. But Coleridge insinuates that it may nevertheless have a connection with real events. Because it appears shortly before the death of the crew, it seems to be a pre-cognitive vision much like the one that preceded the death of Coleridge's own father. Coleridge relates the event in a letter to Poole. When the elder Coleridge was sleeping away from home, "he dreamt that Death had appeared to him, as he is commonly painted, &



touched him with his Dart." He reported this dream to his wife upon returning home, and eventually went to bed "very well, & in high spirits." He died a short while later that night. The child Samuel, awakened by his mother's shriek, said "Papa is dead." His own response still perplexes him as he writes to Poole because he had gone to sleep before his father arrived home and therefore knew nothing of his return or his dream. Coleridge muses, "How I came to think of his Death, I cannot tell; but so it was.--Dead he was . . . ." (CL 1: 355). He is still mulling over the problem in 1818 as he prepares for his lecture on paranormal phenomena (LL 2: 202, 207). In 1797-98, it makes its way into his Mariner's narrative. The sailor's vision, too, is proved correct by the events that follow. That very night after moonrise, as the Mariner remembers with great particularity, his shipmates "dropped down one by one" (l. 219; PW 1: 196). True to his vision, he alone survives to see again his "own countree" (l. 467; PW 1: 204), but, also true to the vision, his life is reduced to a nightmare.

In the worlds of the Mariner and of Coleridge, the line between dream and reality is not so solid as we might assume. Coleridge recorded in his notebook that there is a species of "deeper dream" that leaves behind an "imageless but profound Presentiment" (CN 3: 4409). He does not confine his speculations to his poetic and private writing, but voices them publicly as well. In *The Statesman's Manual* he writes of

States, of which it would be scarcely too bold to say that we *dream the things themselves*; so exact, minute, and vivid beyond all power of ordinary memory is the portraiture, so marvellously perfect our brief metempsychosis into the very *being*, as it were, of the person who seems

to address us. . . . Not only may we expect, that men of strong religious feelings, but little religious knowledge, will occasionally be tempted to regard such occurrences as supernatural visitations; but it ought not to surprise us, if such dreams should sometimes be confirmed by the event, as though they had actually possessed a character of divination. For who shall decide, how far a perfect reminiscence of past experiences, (of many perhaps that had escaped our reflex consciousness at the time)--who shall determine, to what extent this reproductive imagination, unsophisticated by the will, and undistracted by intrusions from the senses, may or may not be concentrated and sublimed into foresight and presentiment? (*LS* 80-81)

Coleridge's speculations on this subject overlap Hollenback's. When empowered through recollection--"concentered and sublimed," as Coleridge says--the imagination becomes an organ of knowledge and perception. It enables the exteriorization of the soul or "consciousness principle"--Coleridge's "metempsychosis"--and this dissociated consciousness, in whatever form it takes, may perform acts or acquire information "otherwise impossible while one is in the ordinary waking state subject to the normal limitations of the physical body" (Hollenback 137). Coleridge would agree with Hollenback that such phenomena are "supernormal," but not "supernatural," though they may be taken as such by the percipient (Hollenback 17 n40).

But the Mariner's vision may be even more deeply involved with reality than a pre-cognitive vision. Coleridge, by withholding any "realistic" or "rational" explanation for the death of the crew and the Mariner's survival, admits to the poem the

possibility that the Mariner's vision not only foresees but creates physical events. This possibility, as radical as it may sound, really only extends the power of imagination that both Wordsworth and Coleridge openly explored in other poems. In Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," Harry Gill callously deprives an old woman of the means of keeping warm. She pronounces a curse on him:

She pray'd, her wither'd hand uprearing,

While Harry held her by the arm—

"God! who art never out of hearing,

"O may he never more be warm!" (ll. 97-100; *LB* 61)

Harry "heard what she had said," and turned away already "icy-cold" (ll. 103-4; *LB* 62). From that day forward he grew colder and colder, piling on coats and blankets to no avail: "a-bed or up, by night or day; / His teeth they chatter, chatter still" (ll. 125-26). Wordsworth firmly places this phenomenon within the real world by noting in the advertisement to the *Lyrical Ballads* that "the tale of Goody Blake and Harry Gill is founded on a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire" (*LB* 739). In Siebers' terms, Harry Gill has granted Goody Blake supernatural powers, marking her as different. Siebers, however, does not address, as Wordsworth's poem does, "the power of the human imagination" to "produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous" (Preface to 1800 ed.; *LB* 757).

Coleridge undertakes a similar project in "The Three Graves," a poem which traces the physical efficacy of a mother's curse. In his preface Coleridge explains the interest that generated the poem:

I was not led to choose this story from any partiality to tragic,

much less monstrous events . . . but from finding in it a striking proof of the possible effect on the imagination, from an idea violently and suddenly impressed on it. I had been reading Bryan Edwards's account of the effects of the *Oby* witchcraft on the Negroes in the West Indies, and Hearne's deeply interesting anecdotes of similar workings on the imagination of the Copper Indians . . . and I conceived the design of shewing that instances of this kind are not peculiar to savage or barbarous tribes, and of illustrating the mode in which the mind is affected in these cases, and the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning. (269)

Ford suggests that "the experimental nature of the whole volume of *Lyrical Ballads* stems from the fact that Wordsworth and Coleridge were expressing in poetry the current medical debate on the powers of imagination" (193). Alan Bewell also notes with regard to these poems that medical literature at the time was steeped in the investigation of the reciprocal relationship between the imagination and the body (144-150). Among the theories that Coleridge explored was magnetism, which, as Ford says, presented the possibility that "in certain altered states of consciousness . . . a sick person [could] be restored to health" (105). Another was the theory of maternal impressions, toward which Coleridge exhibited his "usual blend of scepticism and belief" while appreciating "its recognition of the potential of the imagination as a somatic agency, as a cognitive faculty which could literally instigate physical change. This potential was acutely expressed in times of emotional unrest or states of semi-consciousness" (Ford 189-190).

Ford reminds us that the term "psychosomatic," which we use so freely today, was coined by Coleridge (168). In a letter of 1811 Coleridge writes, "what I keep out of my mind or rather *keep down* in a state of under-consciousness, is sure to act meanwhile with it's whole power of poison on my Body" (CL 3: 310). Speaking of the mystics, Coleridge says we should not be surprised "that under an excitement at once so strong and so unusual, the man's body should sympathize with the struggles of his mind . . ." (BL 1: 150-51). As early as his autobiographical letters to Poole, Coleridge claims that his own body has often been "diseased & fevered" by his imagination (CL 1: 348). Hollenback, too, discusses the mind's ability to produce changes in the body and names it "somatic empowerment." He attributes the phenomenon of stigmatization to this power of imagination (271-72). He also suggests that during hypnotic trance, the hypnotist's thoughts may become concretized in the body of another (182-83).

Coleridge speculated likewise

that under certain conditions one human Being may so act on the body as well as on the mind of another as to produce a morbid Sleep, from which the Brain awakes while the organs of sense remain in stupor. . . . That the same vis ab extra may act medically, there is no reason to doubt--any more than of the effects of Opium. (CM 3: 371)

Extrapolating from these hypotheses, we could quite reasonably conclude that the Mariner's vision effected not so much the crew's deaths as his own preservation: having projected for him the sentence Life-in-death, his imagination also works to keep him alive. But the swift expiration of the crew soon after the vision suggests an explanation that goes beyond even psychosomatic influence. The Mariner may have objectified his

vision to such an extent that it became perceptible to the other seamen. Hollenback discusses the accounts of such phenomena, drawing special attention to the *tulpa* created by monks and magicians of Tibet:

unlike ordinary hallucinations, these deliberately created illusions or materialized thought-forms (*tulpas*) possess the remarkable property of not only being subjectively perceptible to the individual who created them but they may also be perceived by others. (197-98)

One Westerner, Alexandra David-Neel, who lived for years in Tibet, reports that she perceived a number of these thought forms. She says that many Tibetans believed that these "phantoms" could become real beings capable of independent action, even of rebellion against and murder of their creators (313). On the precise ontological status of these "materializations," David-Neel suspends judgment: "I affirm nothing. I only relate what I have heard from people whom, in other circumstances, I had found trustworthy . . ." (314). She also, however, relates her own experience. After learning and practicing the meditative techniques of Tibetan Buddhism, she applied herself to projecting her own *tulpa*, an attempt motivated by her "habitual incredulity" (314). She succeeded in creating a phantom which gradually became "fixed" in form. At least one other person saw the *tulpa* in her tent and "took it for a live lama" (315). David-Neel concludes,

There is nothing strange in the fact that I may have created my own hallucination. The interesting point is that in these cases of materialization, others see the thought-forms that have been created. (315)

The Mariner, it may be argued, does nothing deliberately, but his passivity, on David-Neel's account, does not militate against such a "materialization" of his vision. David-Neel points out that in some cases, "apparently the author of the phenomenon generates it unconsciously, and is not even in the least aware of the apparition being seen by others" (308). The Mariner's shipmates might then have brought about their own deaths through the power of their own somatic imaginations, in much the same way that the victims of the curses in "Goody Blake" and "The Three Graves" empower the words spoken against them.

However obliquely and inconclusively suggested throughout, this power of creative projection becomes explicit in the final "supernatural" event of the poem when the Mariner's thought-forms clearly do acquire enough "material" existence to become perceptible to others. For the wonders of his voyage do not cease when he enters the bay. "Seraph-men" appear once more to take their final departure:

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,

It was a heavenly sight!

They stood as signals to the land,

Each one a lovely light . . . . (ll. 492-95; *PW* 1: 205)

This time, Coleridge supplies witnesses. Moments after the Mariner sees this sight, he hears the "dash of oars" as the Pilot's boat approaches (l. 500), and he overhears the conversation of the three inside:

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,

"Why, this is strange, I trow!

Where are those lights so many and fair,

That signal made but now?"

"Strange. by my faith!" the Hermit said--

"And they answered not our cheer!" (ll. 523-28; *PW* 1: 206)

In this last scene at least, the Mariner's phantoms have become fact to others. They can even be seen to serve a particular purpose: they stand "as signals to the land" and bring help. Coleridge, by introducing the Pilot, his boy, and the Hermit at the end of the voyage, has provided verification for beings and events that he has laboured to present as projections of fevered imagination. Projections they are, but such is the power of the witching imagination in this poem that it can externalize its creations not only for the projector, but for others outside his psyche.

In "The Ancient Mariner" Coleridge has portrayed what Hollenback calls the "transsubjective efficacy of thought and will." In the spectral realm, the "matrix of ghosts," thought becomes deed and image becomes thing. The concretization that takes place as a result of empowerment, as Hollenback insists, is not "always a merely private hallucination . . . for there are fairly numerous occasions when the ex-static's thoughts or desires paranormally transcend the boundaries of the purely subjective" (Hollenback 156). Alexandra David-Neel's experience in Tibet constitutes one such example. As we have already seen, Monroe states in terms strikingly similar to Coleridge's that in Locale II thought "is the force that produces energy, assembles 'matter' into form, and provides channels of perception and communication" (Monroe 74). Hollenback sums up the experiences of David-Neel, Monroe, and others in words that aptly describe the final outcome of "The Ancient Mariner":



the boundaries between a person's subjective universe and the objective world of physical reality that we ordinarily take for granted as being sharp, rigid, and unbridgeable are really quite fluid. Sense-experience teaches us that this boundary is sharp. However, under certain exceptional conditions . . . what an individual concocts in his or her imagination can sometimes become immediately experienced as an objective datum perceptible to others. Under those circumstances, the boundaries between real and imaginary begin to dissolve in a most peculiar way. (158-9)

Such a conclusion may be unpalatable to many in our own "enlightened age," but it is far from incompatible with Coleridge's views. In 1807 he writes,

Form is factitious *Being*, and Thinking is the Process. Imagination the Laboratory, in which Thought elaborates Essence into Existence. (CN 2: 3158)

He defines essence and existence in the *Biographia*:

Essence . . . means the principle of *individuation*, the inmost principle of the *possibility*, of any thing, *as* that particular thing. It is equivalent to the *idea* of a thing . . . . Existence, on the other hand, is distinguished from essence, by the superinduction of *reality*. (2: 62)

The two passages taken together suggest that imagination is the intermediate space in which idea or image becomes reality, becomes thing. Engell and Bate note that Coleridge's "dialectic of matter and spirit, the 'polar logic' of nature and mind, objective and subjective" included a stress on "an *act* of intelligence that creates matter

or nature" (*BL* 1: lxxvi). Citing the preceding entry, they say that imagination is the reconciler. These concepts are familiar to students of Coleridge, but his familiarity with the witching imagination and the "transsubjective efficacy" portrayed in "The Ancient Mariner" suggest that Coleridge's "dynamic philosophy" was more than a philosophical theory formed through reading and reflection. It seems responsive to the fluidity of reality and imagination that is a fact of visionary experience. Ford points out that "psychosomatic" is not the only word Coleridge coined to express the relationship between "soma and psyche": "corporific" is another (176). Coleridge links the "corporific power" with the "Creative Act" that not only creates but preserves the "Material World" (*CM* 3: 949; [c. 1815-17]). The "Creative Act" he links in turn with the primary imagination which he defines as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (*BL* 1: 304). Even Coleridge's public and philosophical statements reflect the imagination's power to "make bodies," or, to use Monroe's expression, to assemble matter into form.

If the Mariner's mind is indeed corporific, we are then left with a final question: do his transsubjective projections actually bring him home? Just as Coleridge gives no "natural" explanation for the death of the crew, he gives no satisfactory explanation for the Mariner's homecoming, a lack that both Stevenson and Christensen fail to address. The reader may wish to believe that the Mariner returned by natural means. Perhaps the agents that brought him home were no more than naturally occurring wind and ocean currents made extraordinary by the Mariner's hallucinatory state. It is not impossible that an unmanned ship might reach shore with a solitary survivor. But for this mariner, such a return would itself have been nothing short of miraculous. He

reaches not just any shore, but the shore of his own country and the very point of his departure--the hill, the kirk, the lighthouse. In addition, his voyage home was a long and complicated one, involving much more than the simple crossing of an ocean. By the time "supernatural" events began to occur, the ship had already rounded Cape Horn and sailed north into the doldrums. To return to Britain, it would have had to drift west, circumnavigating the globe, or east, navigating once again around the Horn, a treacherous passage that requires constant changes of sail in even the best of conditions. Any natural explanation the reader might provide must be as implausible as the supernatural one. The remaining suggestion that the entire voyage was nothing more than a dream is countered by the accuracy of the Mariner's geographical, climatic, and zoological observations. Although Coleridge read travel narratives, one can hardly assume that the Mariner did.

But there remains one other possible explanation, though it hardly stabilizes the shifting plates of reality in "The Ancient Mariner." Coleridge admitted, after all, that a ghost *might* be "a departed spirit act[ing] on ~~the~~ an embodied spirit and thus produc[ing] ~~for~~ in the Brain a corresponding Appearance, which in proportion to ~~other~~ the vividness of the impression will have apparent *outness*" (LS 81 n2). Such a translation of spirit into projected brain-image appears in "The Destiny of Nations." Originally written as a contribution to Southey's *Joan of Arc*, Coleridge's poem focuses squarely on "preternatural agency" and addresses the role of "Fancy" in generating it:

. . . . 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. teaching Self-control.  
Till Superstition with unconscious hand  
Seat Reason on her throne. Wherefore not vain.  
Nor yet without permitted power impressed.

I deem those legends terrible . . . . (ll. 80-90; *PW* 1: 134)

Here Coleridge suggests that fancy, or imagination, does not merely react passionately and figuratively to unfamiliar natural phenomenon, but creates figures that have some intimation of divine reality.<sup>6</sup> As Anthony John Harding says in connection with this poem, Coleridge favoured the notion that "the earliest poets could enter a state of trance" that provided "a kind of alternative revelation" to scripture; he preferred this possibility to the "Enlightenment notion that the early poets simply described the wonders of nature" (47-48). The myths and legends of nations, therefore, are

. . . Wild phantasies! yet wise.

On the victorious goodness of high God

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<sup>6</sup>The fact that Coleridge uses the term "fancy" rather than "imagination" in this poem need not distract us. The bulk of the poem was written by 1796--a large portion for Southey's *Joan of Arc* and another for Coleridge's own *Visions of the Maid of Orleans* (*PW* 1: 131 n1). David Perkins points out that Coleridge first distinguished between the two faculties in a letter to William Sotheby in 1802 (*Writers* 527 n15; *CL* 2: 865-66). In the preface to "The Three Graves," we have seen Coleridge using the terms interchangeably, even though the preface was written for the *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817 (*PW* 1: 269). If he uses "fancy" purposefully in "The Destiny of Nations," it is, perhaps, because he sees the fancy as less deliberately creative than the imagination.

Teaching reliance. and medicinal hope.

Till from Bethabrah northward. heavenly Truth

With gradual steps. winning her difficult way.

Transfer their rude Faith perfected and pure.

(ll. 121-26; *PW* 1: 135-36)

The notion that fancy can serve spiritual reality allows Coleridge to walk the thin and wavering line between admitting visitation and rejecting all supernatural experiences as deceptions of the witching imagination. In this poem, intuition is paradoxically articulated through what Coleridge normally calls "delusion." He speculates that "If there be Beings of a higher class than Man" (l. 127), perhaps a "Spirit"

. . . from the invisible World

Burst on the MAIDEN'S eye. impregnating Air

With Voices and strange Shapes. illusions apt

Shadowy of Truth. . . . (132-36, 130 foll.; *PW* 1: 136)

Joan simultaneously encounters the spiritual dimension and "hallucinates" it; in her ecstatic trances, she both perceives and projects. Coleridge's presentation of Joan's experiences approaches a view similar to that of Sufi mysticism. The Creative Imagination not only creates, but also reveals: it is "the organ of prophetic inspiration which perceives, and at the same time confers existence upon, a reality of its own" (Corbin 88). It is the "place of apparition" in which "the Incorporeal Beings of the world of Mystery" assume a "subtile" body, and where "pure concepts and sensory data meet and flower into personal figures" (189).

These descriptions throw a new light on Coleridge's words in *The Statesman's*

*Manual* when he calls the imagination “that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense . . . gives birth to a system of symbols” (29). He is certainly not discussing the witching imagination here, but this passage indicates that the many tissues of imagination are interwoven not only with each other, but with reality, both the sensory and supra-sensory dimensions. In “The Destiny of Nations,” fancy is an organ of perception, or, rather, it is the organ which translates apprehensions of supra-sensory reality into figures that the understanding, the discursive, sense-bound faculty, can grasp. This function is similar to that attributed by Engell to the imagination. He explains that imagination makes the truths of reason available to the understanding by translating them into a language of “concrete forms” (*Creative* 338). But there is one important difference: in “The Destiny of Nations” and “The Ancient Mariner” the images are “incorporated” indeed. They assume subtle matter through the corporific power of the witching imagination. Coleridge’s armies of ugly things, then, and the four angels that defend him, though they be products of “diseased imagination,” may also, like the figure that appeared to Ibn ‘Arabi in his delirium, indicate the presence and activity of the spiritual dimension. Like Joan’s voices and beings, Coleridge’s projections of spiritual combatants might also be “illusions apt / Shadowy of Truth.”

The effect of such experiences on the projector-percipient is reflected in the Mariner’s “waking up”: he sees the “natural” ocean, but knows now that the spirit dimension, the world of Mystery, is all around him, even if invisible and incorporeal. This knowledge may be reassuring or disruptive--or both. “The Ancient Mariner” expresses mostly the nightmarish, frightening aspect, but for Coleridge, where there are

demons there are also angels. The motto from Thomas Burnet, added in 1817, goes some way to correcting the imbalance in the narrative itself: the motto asserts that there *are* invisible things in the universe and stresses the “better world” left under-represented in the Mariner’s guilt-ridden account.

But the motto also re-asserts the uncertain status of the supernatural in “The Ancient Mariner”:

I readily believe that there are more invisible than visible things in the universe. But who shall describe for us their families, their ranks, relationships, distinguishing features and functions? What do they do? Where do they live? The human mind has always circled about knowledge of these things, but never attained it. (trans. D. Perkins *Writers* 405)

As Henry More said of “Dreams” that occur during “fits,”

these Dreams the precipitant and unskilful are forward to conceit to be Representations extraordinary and supernatural, which they call *Revelations or Visions*; of which there can be no certainty at all, no more than of a Dream. (qtd. *CN* 1: 1069n)

No certainty that they are revelations, perhaps, but also no certainty that they do not indicate spiritual presences.

What then of the “nightmare world” of the Ancient Mariner? Has he by creating his own phantoms revealed the spirit world, and bestowed upon the beings of the world of Mystery subtle matter and agency in the world of sense? Is Coleridge’s poem a poem of supernatural visitation after all?

If so, it does not depict visitation in the usual sense. Coleridge himself, in his account of the poem's genesis, says with a significant lack of specificity that the "incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural" (*BL* 2: 6). Their status ultimately remains unsettled. Through his methodical treatment of alterations in consciousness, superstition, and conflation of objective and subjective in the Mariner's vision, Coleridge elaborately qualifies what the supernatural is not: it is not the corporeal intrusion of beings from another world. But he never quite clarifies what it is. The supernatural agents in "The Ancient Mariner" are creations of imagination, yet they cannot be dismissed as merely imaginary. By writing the witching imagination, Coleridge has gone beyond the simple demystification and displacement of supernatural encounters to problematize the very categories of the real and the imaginary upon which such a demystification is predicated. In this poem, the supernatural occurs where the real--both corporeal and spiritual--and the imaginary mingle. "The Ancient Mariner" does not insist on their opposition, but reveals their co-inherence.



## The Spectrification of Christabel

Hans Christian Andersen tells the story of a shadow that usurps the place of the man who casts it. When a young philosopher playfully orders his shadow to enter a house across from his and “take a look around” (336), he finds, to his great surprise, that he casts no shadow the next morning. But within a week or so he begins to grow a new one, and he soon settles down to write books about “all that is beautiful and true and good” (336). After many years, his original shadow returns smartly dressed and with a body of its own, though extremely thin. It has become a man of substance, as it were, by spying on and blackmailing others. But it does not have enough substance to cast a shadow of its own. So it suggests that it and the philosopher go traveling together, with it acting as the man and the philosopher as the shadow. The idea is repugnant to the philosopher, and he flatly refuses. As time goes by, however, the man grows weary of speaking of truth and beauty to people who will not listen. He begins to waste away and becomes seriously ill. “‘You look like a shadow of your former self,’ people would say, and when he heard these words a shiver went down his spine” (341). When the shadow returns again, offering to take the man to a spa and pay all the expenses, the philosopher agrees. “And so they traveled, the shadow as master and the master as shadow” (341). On their travels they meet a princess who suffers “from seeing too clearly” (342). She perceives that the shadow does not cast a shadow of its own, but it

convinces her that the man is its shadow. When the shadow and the princess decide to marry, the shadow goes to the man and asks him to let everyone in the kingdom call him a shadow, and never to admit to anyone that he was once a human being. The man refuses, saying that he will talk to the princess and tell her everything. But the shadow reaches her first. "I've just had the most horrible experience that one can have," the shadow exclaims. "Imagine, my shadow has gone mad. He believes he is a man. And that I . . . [*sic*] that I am his shadow!" (344). The princess suggests that they put an end to the shadow's suffering by doing away with the "particle of life" that he does have (344). So the couple have the man executed. Then they get married, to the jubilation of the people.

Ursula Le Guin interprets this story as a Jungian parable: "The man is all that is civilized--learned, kindly, idealistic, decent. . . . The shadow is the man's thwarted selfishness, his unadmitted desires, the swearwords he never spoke, the murders he didn't commit" (60). The man's great mistake lies in not confronting his shadow; "he lets it master him" (61). Le Guin goes on to explain the nature of the shadow:

The shadow is on the other side of our psyche, the dark brother of the conscious mind. It is Cain, Caliban, Frankenstein's monster, Mr. Hyde. . . . It is the Doppelgänger. . . . [I]t is the serpent, Lucifer. The shadow stands on the threshold between the conscious and the unconscious mind, and we meet it in our dreams, as sister, brother, friend, beast, monster, enemy, guide. It is all we don't want to, can't, admit into our conscious self, all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied, or not used. . . . The less you look

at it . . . the stronger it grows, until it can become a menace, an intolerable load, a threat within the soul. (63-4)

Le Guin's account of the shadow might seem as much a retelling of Christabel's story as that of the young philosopher. An innocent young woman meets a strange and beautiful lady in the midnight wood. The stranger seduces and gains control over her, like the shadow in Andersen's tale, and eventually usurps her place in the daylight world. Le Guin's conclusion regarding Anderson's story seems to fit "Christabel" equally well: "reduced to the language of daylight" --fairy tale and fantasy being "the language of the night"--the story says that "a man who will not confront and accept his shadow is a lost soul" (62).

A Jungian reading of "Christabel" becomes all the more credible given Coleridge's own reflections on "the language of the night":

Language of Dreams.--The language of the Dream = Night ✕ that of Waking = the Day. It is a language of Images and Sensations, the various dialects of which are far less different from each other, than the various <Day-> Languages of Nations. Proved even by the Dream Books of different Countries & ages. (CN 3: 4409; [1818])

The images of this language, Coleridge continues, are "frequently ironical: as if the fortunes of the Ego diurnus appeared exceedingly droll and ridiculous to the Ego nocturnus--Dung = Gold &c." For Coleridge, dreams are sometimes the language of the night self. Coleridge's awareness of a "dark side" appears in 1803 in "The Pains of Sleep" as well. In this poem he concludes that evil dreams come from "The unfathomable hell within" (l. 46; *PW* 1: 390).

"Christabel" has not infrequently been read as an allegory of the unconscious, of the ego's struggle with the irrational forces collectively known as the shadow. Michael E. Holstein, for example, asserts that the poem "illustrate[s] Coleridge's anticipation of Jung's formulation of the psychological crisis brought on by confronting the shadow" (123). Matthew Brennan argues that Geraldine's appearance in the wood at midnight, a setting of "spiritual crisis," indicates that Christabel must "face her shadow" (43), and that Geraldine specifically "symbolizes" Christabel's "unacknowledged sexuality" (44).

But "Christabel" can express psychological intuitions without being reducible to them. Dreams for Coleridge were not only a language; they were often encounters. If Geraldine originates from Christabel's unconscious, she might embody aspects of her creator's nature of which she is not aware, but she might "embody" those characteristics in a more concrete sense, as a quasi-material figure of nightmare. She might even be a version of the phenomenon of dissociated consciousness discussed by Hollenback and hinted at in "Phantom or Fact." In this case, however, the doppelgänger is not a "lovely form," the poet's soul, but the "dark brother" concretized. Given the power of the witching imagination, one might quite literally be seized by one's shadow.

Read with the witching imagination in mind, Geraldine and the shadow of Andersen's tale resemble the *tulpa* in Alexandra David-Neel's account of magic in Tibet. Generalizing from the stories she heard while in Tibet, she writes:

Once the *tulpa* is endowed with enough vitality to be capable of playing the part of a real being, it tends to free itself from its maker's control.

. . . Sometimes the phantom becomes a rebellious son and one hears of uncanny struggles that have taken place between magicians and their

creatures. the former being severely hurt or even killed by the latter.

(313)

Even the phantom that David-Neel herself succeeded in projecting became somewhat unmanageable. She recalls that over time his features and behaviour changed: "The fat, chubby-cheeked fellow grew leaner, his face assumed a vaguely mocking, sly, malignant look. He became more troublesome and bold. In brief, he escaped my control" (315). He became so troublesome that she decided to put an end to him, but found this was no easy task:

the presence of that unwanted companion began to prove trying to my nerves; it turned into a "day-nightmare." Moreover, I was beginning to plan my journey to Lhasa and needed a quiet brain devoid of other preoccupations, so I decided to dissolve the phantom. I succeeded, but only after six months of hard struggle. My mind-creature was tenacious of life. (315)

This is not to say that in "Christabel" Coleridge expresses a firm belief in thought-forms that can acquire enough independence and materiality to kill their creators. But what one feels and what one assents to intellectually can be two different things. Even David-Neel suspends judgment on the "materialization" of thought-forms despite the weight of her own experience. In "Christabel" Coleridge takes up the theme of the witching imagination where he left it at the end of "The Ancient Mariner"; he unfolds not so much the imagination's power to concretize thought as the dislocating impact such experiences might have on the projector-percipient. This impact is suggested in phrases like "Life-in-Death," "Phantom or Fact," "dream of life," and

"Reality's dark dream." In "Christabel" Coleridge dramatizes the true horror of nightmare, the erosion of one's own ontological security in the face of "material" dreams. The more substantial the dream, the more shadowy the life of the dreamer becomes.

Coleridge had already suggested such "spectrification" through the Mariner's condition at the end of his adventure. The Mariner's encounters leave him disoriented: having lived too long between dream and reality, he can no longer distinguish between them. Indeed, the difference no longer exists since his subjective world has permeated the objective. This erasure of boundaries leaves him homeless; he can no longer find a solid place in the waking world, but roams from land to land like a displaced spirit. He has become a spectral figure himself, taken by the Pilot's boy for "the devil" (l. 569; *PW* 1: 207) and by the Wedding Guest for a ghost or walking skeleton (ll. 224-31; *PW* 1: 196). Just as Geraldine reaches out her hand for Christabel, the Mariner seizes the Wedding Guest with his bony hand and entrances him with his story. The encounter leaves the Wedding Guest disoriented and alienated in turn: having missed the fellowship of the wedding banquet, "he went like one that hath been stunned, / And is of sense forlorn" (ll. 623-24; *PW* 1: 209). Although the Mariner's voyage is over, his Life-in-death sentence continues.

In "Christabel" Coleridge takes the corporeal supernatural of Gothic romance and folklore and uses it to express this spectrifying power of nightmare. True to Coleridge's theory of supernatural visitation, Geraldine is a creature of imagination, a projection of Christabel's preoccupations and unconscious fears. When Geraldine crosses from Christabel's subjective world into the material environment of objective

reality, she becomes “supernatural,” maintaining all the powers Christabel’s imagination has given her. Just as she is both dream and supernatural creature, her embrace is both the embrace of nightmare and the magical means to power over Christabel. Through it she initiates an exchange of identity and substance that will end in Christabel’s displacement to the spectral realm. Put simply, Geraldine is a shadow of the witching time looking for place and substance in the waking world. Like the shadow in Andersen’s tale, she achieves her ontological security at Christabel’s expense: substance and shadow exchange places.

“Christabel” begins in a wood, a commonplace of fairy tale and romance, including those in Percy’s *Reliques*. “The Marriage of Sir Gawaine,” for instance, which Donald Reuel Tuttle lists as one of the three ballads from the *Reliques* that most inspired “Christabel” (Tuttle 451-52), features a loathly lady sitting between an “oke” and a “greene holleye.” She is capable of shape-shifting from hag to “lady brighte.” Elizabeth M. Liggins reminds us that in folklore and ballad the forest is the home of fairies, “enchanted mortals,” and “departed spirits.” The forest is “sometimes a tabooed place; if mortals enter it, they are likely to summon an enchanted person or a supernatural spirit . . . ” (94). The fact that Christabel meets Geraldine in the wood implies immediately that the stranger may be other than she appears. Kathryn Hume suggests that the conventional settings of romance have symbolic significance. Synthesizing the work of Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell, and Carl Jung, among others, she argues that the “archetypal romance pattern” finds its prototype in the inner pattern of “psychic development” by which the ego gradually comes to identify “with

the conscious rather than the unconscious" ("Romance" 129-30). The hero must cross the threshold into a "strange land" of "magic and extra-rational forces" in which he undergoes trials with monstrous creatures, encounters that signify the "ego's developmental struggle" (132-34). Central to Hume's discussion is her identification of the strange land with the "realm" of the unconscious. She notes that "the entry into the special world is often clearly defined as a veritable threshold" which might be signaled by woods, water, and doors or gates (136).

In conformity with the romance pattern and in apparent anticipation of modern psychology, Coleridge gives us all three variants of the threshold. His first mention of Christabel places her within the wood:

The lovely lady, Christabel,  
Whom her father loves so well,  
What makes her in the wood so late.

A furlong from the castle gate? (ll. 23-26; *PW* 1: 216)

He marks her return to the castle first with a moat (l. 123; *PW* 1: 220), then with "a little door . . . / All in the middle of the gate" (ll. 125-26), and, finally and most specifically, with the "threshold of the gate" (l. 132). According to Hume's theory, Christabel's forest is the perilous realm of her unconscious, and Geraldine is one of the irrational forces she must confront in her struggle for "Individuation" (130).

It is true that moats, gates, and doors are straightforward attributes of castles, which are in turn attributes of romantic medievalism; a romance must almost inevitably include some of these objects by virtue of the genre. But Hume's suggestions do harmonize well with Coleridge's interest in levels of consciousness. These he organizes



by a "spatial image of the mind," as Ford says, complete with "borders" and "liminalities" (39). Thus, a lyrical notebook entry of 1804 reads: "Of a great metaphysician/he looked at (into?) his own Soul with a Telescope/what seemed all irregular, he saw & shewed to be beautiful Constellations & he added to the Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds" (CN 1: 1798). In another entry he ponders how much of "one's nature" is known "only to God--how much lies *below* his own Consciousness" (CN 1: 1554; [1803]). But however attuned Coleridge was to the existence of the unconscious, he was equally sensitive to the mental space he called the "matrix of ghosts," the dimension where imaginary creatures become supernatural visitants. Christabel has, as Hume's theory of romance suggests, crossed the threshold into a strange realm, but it is the spectral realm where figures of the unconscious become quasi-physical entities. In his notebook Coleridge represents sleep as a "region & realized Faery Land" (CN 1: 1718; [1803]). Fairyland can likewise represent "Morphean Space" (CN 4: 5360). In "Christabel," the conventional forest of fairy tale and romance becomes an indicator of the realm between waking and sleeping.

The conventional forest had, of course, been appropriated already by Gothic writers before Coleridge wrote "Christabel." Tuttle has shown that many elements of Coleridge's opening scene derive from "the stage properties" of the novels he was reading and reviewing at the time, especially Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Some of the more obvious of these properties are forests, castles, tolling clocks, midnight, moonlight, and barking dogs (Tuttle 458). Edward Dramin argues that Coleridge employed Gothic clichés in "Christabel" in order to parody the genre. But unlike Peacock, whose parodies deny "the reality of the supernatural," Coleridge

“affirms the continuous presence and power of the other-worldly” and “rebukes only the ineffectual portrayal of the supernatural”; he “derides the banality of the Gothic by parodying standard paraphernalia” (221).<sup>1</sup> But while Dramin helpfully stresses Coleridge’s distinction between the true Supernatural (a present and operative spiritual dimension) and the material terrors to which he objected, he leaves unaddressed Coleridge’s interest in supernatural visitation as a particular (and peculiar) domain of experience. Coleridge never denies the “facts” of recorded encounters, but redefines them, locating them in the witching imagination’s power to give outness to ideas and emotions. From Coleridge’s perspective, the Gothic novelists have inadvertently absorbed one significant detail from the ballads and romances they exploit: supernatural phenomena are usually associated with special conditions. The Gothic writers use the special conditions to suggest the otherworld and so build excitement and suspense. For Coleridge, on the other hand, these special conditions suggest conditions of mind. In “Christabel” he both critiques the clichés and employs them to portray the special somnial space in which the supernatural encounters occur.

The forest is one such cliché, and it conforms to Coleridge’s spatial image of the

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Dramin persuasively presents the mastiff bitch as a parody of Gothic dogs. In response to G. W. Knight’s comment that the dog’s howling and barking produces “nightmarish fear and tension,” Dramin reminds us that “the mastiff is ‘toothless’ and utters ‘sixteen short howls, not over loud.’ A politely barking, toothless dog evokes amusement, not ‘deathly horror,’ especially since mastiffs have large teeth and bark loudly” (222). Furthermore, this dog, he observes,

replies to each stroke of the bell with disciplined precision . . . . When the bells chime twelve times on the hour, the mastiff responds with twelve howls. When the bells ring four times on the quarter hour, the dog answers meticulously with four howls. . . . [A] diligent mastiff punctiliously answering a tolling bell . . . elicits feelings other than dread. (222)

mind. The time of Christabel's visit to the wood is another. Christabel has come to the moonlit forest just as the clock is striking twelve, the time especially associated with ghosts and evil spirits. John Brand wrote in 1777 that, because they come from "the Land of Darkness, and the Shadow of Death, the Night, in a more especial Manner, seems to be their Hour" (qtd. Liggins 99). It is the "witching time," as Hamlet calls it, "the season wherein the spirit held his wont to walk." Coleridge, borrowing from Hamlet, calls the space between waking and sleeping the "true witching time"; it is the "matrix of ghosts" in which imagination confers substance on the thoughts and images that possess us (*Friend* 1: 140, 142).

Coleridge combines these conventions of place and time with other less symbolic indications of Christabel's state of mind. Christabel has come into the wood at midnight to pray. The role of Crashaw's "Hymn to St. Teresa" in Coleridge's creation of Christabel has often been discussed, but it imposes neither the theme of "mystical union" that Thomas R. Preston finds nor that of "un-mystical union" argued by Rhonda Johnson Ray. Rather, the shadowy presence of the medieval mystic serves to establish Christabel's cast of mind. Although Coleridge stated that he had the "Hymn" in mind while writing Part II (*TT* 2: 369), Teresa's attributes of sincerity and devotion seem present in Christabel from the beginning. Indeed, the Conclusion to Part I compares her to a "youthful hermitess" who "praying always, prays in sleep" (ll. 320, 322; *PW* 1: 226).

Coleridge himself wondered whether Crashaw's "Hymn" had not "by some subtle process of the mind" suggested "the first thought of the whole poem" (*TT* 2: 369). Lines 35–42 of Crashaw's poem seem particularly relevant to our first glimpse of

Christabel:

Love touch't her HEART, and lo it beates  
 High, and burnes with such brave heates;  
 Such thirsts to dy, as dares drink up,  
 A thousand cold deaths in one cup.  
 Good reason. For she breathes All fire.  
 Her weake brest heaves with strong desire  
 Of what she may with fruitles wishes  
 Seek for amongst her MOTHER'S kisses.

*(Complete Poetry 54-55)*

Christabel, too, is stirred by a love that disrupts her dreams and drives her from the stifling safety of her father's castle. Critics have assumed that Coleridge took up Crashaw's theme of Teresa's innocence and sacred marriage, but the "Hymn" also portrays a temperament given to heightened emotion and imagination, qualities that, according to Coleridge, engender mystic "delusions." Andrea Henderson points out that Coleridge had already written a poem about a female visionary in "The Destiny of Nations." Comparing Joan's "troublous ecstasy" with Christabel's trance in Geraldine's arms, Henderson finds that Joan, like Christabel, "has a supernatural encounter which is facilitated by her sensibility and results in chaotic amplification of her passions" (890). Coleridge's later comments on Teresa's autobiography in 1812 suggest that what he found evocative in Crashaw's poem was the portrait of a visionary sensibility:

Accustomed in early childhood to read "with most believing heart" all

the legends of saints. [and] martyrs . . . . In the habit of privately . . .  
 reading books of chivalry to her mother, and then all night to herself.  
 . . . A frame of exquisite sensibility by nature, rendered more so by a  
 burning fever, which no doubt had some effect upon her brain, as she  
 was from that time subject to frequent fainting fits and *deliquia* . . . .  
 Combine these . . . and think, how impossible it was, but that such a  
 creature, so innocent, and of an imagination so heated, and so well  
 peopled should often mistake the . . . approaches to *deliquium* for divine  
 raptures . . . . (LR 4: 68-69)

We find the young, devout, and romantic Christabel about to begin a midnight  
 vigil for her knight. She moves almost as if in a dream, driven to pray by dreams she  
 has already had:

She stole along, she nothing spoke,

The sighs she heaved were soft and low,

.....

She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,

And in silence prayeth she. (ll. 31-36; PW 1: 216-17)

Possessed by the images of her dreams even before she reaches the oak, she then kneels  
 and focuses her mind and heart on protecting her lover from the dangers she has dreamt  
 of the night before. This is her condition when Geraldine appears before her, a "damsel  
 bright" (l. 58). Coleridge introduces Geraldine in a manner precisely opposite to  
 Shakespeare's treatment of the ghost in *Hamlet*. In his 1812 lecture on that play,  
 Coleridge exclaims,

How admirable is the judgment of the poet! Hamlet's own fancy has not conjured up the Ghost of his father: it has been seen by others: he is by them prepared to witness its appearance. & when he does see it he is not brought forward as having long brooded on the subject. The moment before the Ghost enters Hamlet speaks of other matters in order to relieve the weight on his mind: he speaks of the coldness of the night, and observes that he has not heard the clock strike . . . . From the tranquil state of his mind he indulges in moral reflections. Afterwards the Ghost suddenly enters . . . . [T]hus the appearance has all the effect of abruptness, and the reader is totally divested of the notion that <what> the vision is a ~~the-effect~~ figure in the <highly wrought> imagination. (*LL* 1: 386-87).

In contrast, Geraldine has not been seen by others before Christabel, who distinctly is brooding on the dangers to her lover that she has dreamt of. Her mind is far from tranquil. Although Geraldine appears abruptly, she does not appear out of nowhere; she, unlike Hamlet's ghost, is a figure of a highly wrought imagination.

Holstein aptly remarks that Geraldine "crystallizes" out of a "dreamlike setting" (125). In Geraldine we see a projection of Christabel's fears: the subtle enchantress from the romances that Christabel, like Teresa, has undoubtedly read. Like Coleridge's spectres from *The Arabian Nights*, Geraldine has appeared in the space where dream and reality meet. She is the beautiful and duplicitous woman who, Christabel fears, will entrap her knight or take her place at his side. In keeping with the assertions of both Holstein and Brennan, Geraldine is also the concretization of Christabel's shadow, her

"repressed" or "dark" side; she is wildly beautiful, strange, enticing. She is a thought-form, a double that Christabel is unaware of having projected.

Like the creatures of Coleridge's reveries, Geraldine has an existence and a will of her own. Appearing in the guise of a distressed damsel, she tells a tale that wins Christabel's aid. She reaches out and touches her, extending the sensory impression of reverie. But, like the *tulpa* of Tibetan magic, Geraldine achieves a materiality that exceeds the boundaries of mere subjective hallucination. As the Mariner's phantoms cross the "harbour bar" to become visible to the Hermit and Pilot, so Geraldine crosses into Christabel's "real" world. Christabel lifts her over the threshold, "a weary weight," an epithet that itself conveys the oppressiveness of an incubus and reminds us that Geraldine is a figure of dream. Christabel's corporific mind, like the Ancient Mariner's, projects her phantom into the material world of waking consciousness.

As the figure acquires corporeality, it becomes a "supernatural" intruder: a being foreign to the natural world of normal consciousness. Geraldine is possessed of all the powers and shifting associations with which she was endowed in Christabel's imagination. Liggins suggests that critics "attempting to solve the riddle of Geraldine" have often tried to be "needlessly specific about her nature. In folklore there are no sharp distinctions between witches and fairies, between fairies and devils, and between fairies and the dead" (94). The phenomena that accompany Geraldine's passage through the halls of the castle--the famous "angry moan" of the sleeping mastiff, the "fit of flame" from the dying brands--signal her connection to superstition and therefore to imagination (ll. 147-48, 156-59; *PW* 1: 221). But they also indicate her corporeality. Somewhat in the manner of the Pilot and Hermit's conversation, these tokens provide

external verification of Geraldine's objective existence: "now doth Geraldine press down / The rushes of the chamber floor" (173-4).

While these phenomena convey Geraldine's identity as a corporeal and supernatural intruder, the direct and indirect allusions to dream and nightmare in the bedroom scene maintain her status as a figure of the spectral realm. Once she is safely over the threshold, with a foothold in the real world, Geraldine begins to reveal her darker nature to Christabel. As Christabel watches her guest disrobe, she sees "her bosom and half her side-- / A sight to dream of, not to tell!" (252-53). Whatever Christabel sees, it properly belongs in dreams, not in the real world. Geraldine may be a lamia, the serpent of Bard Bracy's dream, a witch with the devil's marks, or, as Tuttle suggests, an animated corpse like that of Matthew Lewis' Bleeding Nun (468). Or, as a creature of dream, she may be all of these, shifting from one form to another.

Kathleen Coburn, in her article "Coleridge and Wordsworth and 'the Supernatural,'" links Coleridge's supernatural poems to the dream-life indicated in his notebooks. Geraldine's "pursuit of Christabel," she says, was a common motif of his dreams: "he was frequently pursued by unpleasing female figures, who, pale and wraith-like, had the trick of altering their shapes, sometimes to impersonate those he loved" (129). She gives as one characteristic example an entry of October 1803 (*CN* 1: 1250):

Dorothy was altered in every feature, a fat, thick-limbed, & rather red-haired [woman]--in short no resemblance to her at all . . . yet I was not surprized.

I was followed up & down by a frightful pale woman who, I



thought. wanted to kiss me. & had the property of giving a shameful  
Disease by breathing in the face.

& again I dreamed that a figure of a woman of a gigantic Height,  
dim & indefinite & smokelike [*possibly* snakelike] appeared--& that I was  
forced to run up toward it & then it changed to a stool--& then appeared  
again in another place--& again I went up in great fright--& it changed to  
some other common thing--yet I felt no surprize. (qtd. Coburn 129)

Coburn concludes that "Geraldine is a malignity out of Coleridge's own dreams," and that "*Christabel* is not a supernatural poem at all, any more than *The Ancient Mariner* is a supernatural poem in the usual sense" (130). She likewise insists that, "for all its Gothic-looking materials," it is not a Gothic romance, "but rather makes use of the medium to project an inner experience" (128). It is "a poem about Death-in-Life," about Coleridge's own "loneliness" and "desolation and dejection." She rightly emphasizes the relationship between Coleridge's dream-life and his supernatural poetry, but stops short of a more concrete connection between Coleridge's dream-life and the poem. "Christabel" not only contains a figure from Coleridge's dreams but is *about* a particular kind of dream: inner experience that acquires outness.

The sight that Christabel sees has all the instability and changeability of dream. Significantly, she experiences the full impact of Geraldine's spectral nature while she is in a trance. When Geraldine lies down and takes her host in her arms, Christabel is immobilized, trapped not only in the stranger's embrace but in a state between waking and sleeping, "with open eyes . . . / Asleep, and dreaming fearfully" (292-93). Geraldine's embrace is the touch of nightmare and resembles the "completed Night-

mair" of Coleridge's notebook:

a completed Night-mair, as it gave the *idea* and *sensation* of actual grasp or touch contrary to *my* will, & in apparent consequence of the malignant will of the external Form, actually appearing or (as sometimes happens) believed to exist/ in which latter case tho' I have two or three times felt a horrid *touch* of Hatred, a *grasp*, or a *weight*, of Hate and Horror abstracted from all (Conscious) form or supposal of Form/ an *abstract touch*/ an *abstract grasp*--an *abstract weight*! (CN 2: 2468)

"Christabel" expresses the sensation of a malignant external weight and grasp through the embrace of a corporeal being. Geraldine is one of the "ugly things" that frequently burst upon Coleridge. The "vision sweet" that follows Christabel's fearful "dream" may well be the guardian spirit of Christabel's mother, a figure so established in Christabel's mental universe, thanks to Sir Leoline's obsession with her death, that she hovers near to defend her daughter from her demons, just as Coleridge's angels took up their posts around his bed to ward off his tormentors.

As Kathleen Wheeler remarks, this embrace is the "core experience" of the narrative, but Coleridge chooses to leave the reader "mystified" ("Disruption" 85). We do know, however, that the experience produces shame; Christabel awakes with the conviction that she has sinned (l. 381; *PW* 1: 228). Her sense of guilt, together with the sexual imagery Coleridge uses to describe the encounter, has produced a variety of readings. Preston argues that the poem should be interpreted within the context of mystical literature in which sexual imagery is often used to express union with "the Divine." Geraldine then becomes the beneficent instrument of Christabel's

"illumination," and is "evil only in the sense that she symbolically manifests God's wrath or terror inflicting pain and drawing out his love through union with the 'holy fire' deep within Christabel" (149). Preston asserts that Geraldine's sex is not female but dual. Dual sexuality, a notion Coleridge would have found in the writings of Böhme, Crashaw, and St. Teresa, provides an alternative to the poem's implied lesbian encounter and also advances the mystical themes (149-50). Ray, on the other hand, argues that "this sexual union with Christabel, considered in light of the traditional mystical union between Christ and soul, suggests that Geraldine seems intent upon taking Christ's place in the union" (517). In her reading, Geraldine is evil indeed. Her momentary reluctance to lie down with Christabel, which some critics see as evidence of her benevolence, or at least ambivalence, Ray interprets as evidence of the free will that was central to Coleridge's "conception of moral evil" (516).

While I agree with Ray that Geraldine's apparent moral ambiguity shows she is capable of choice, and that her words of comfort and assurance are "not so much an indication of the duality of her nature as an illustration of her ability to deceive" (515), I do not see the encounter between Geraldine and Christabel as being informed by the theme of divine union at all.<sup>2</sup> Consistent as it is with Coleridge's thinking on the

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<sup>2</sup>Ray addresses the passage often cited as evidence of Geraldine's good intentions:

All they who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabel!  
And you love them, and for their sake  
And for the good which me befel,  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well. (ll. 227-30)

These words, she argues, are both deceptive and ironic, disarming and threatening (515). But Geraldine's intentions can be harmful to Christabel without her symbolizing

visionary experiences of mystics. Christabel's "mystical" temperament makes her susceptible to the phantoms of her own imagination. A Jungian reading suggests more fully Geraldine's connections with Christabel's psyche. Brennan suggests that Geraldine is female because she represents Christabel's shadow, "a same-sex figure who embodies inferior or undeveloped aspects of personality we keep hidden from consciousness" (44). For Christabel these include her "unacknowledged sexuality and in particular her feelings of shame about sex" (44). The embrace, however, rather than signifying that Christabel accepts these hidden aspects of her personality, establishes her failure to do so (44). Christabel's shadow embraces her and gains control. But Geraldine's connection to Christabel's psyche does not reduce her to a purely symbolic figure. Holmes, who identifies several possible interpretations--"a lesbian reading, a gothic-vampire reading, a daemonic-nature reading"--argues that Geraldine's "protean ambiguity" gives the poem its power. To "develop" and clarify "the 'plot' would be to . . . dissipate the essentially dream-like quality of the involuted, slumbering enigma" (*Visions* 288).

Geraldine's "protean ambiguity," the sexuality of her embrace, her vampiric malignancy, not only create the poem's "dream-like" quality; they are functions of Geraldine's identity as a corporified dream. She is dream become flesh, Christabel's shadow and thought-form. The shame Christabel suffers is the shame that often accompanies nightmares. Coleridge leaves the "core experience" unspecified precisely because the guilt of nightmare is "imaginary" and internal, not the result of deeds

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Satan. Geraldine is simply seeking security and substantiality, and Christabel is her means to those ends.

committed in the flesh during waking consciousness. Christabel awakes the next morning unsure of what has happened or what she has done (or dreamt), but certain that she has sinned:

And Christabel awoke and spied  
 The same who lay down by her side--  
 O rather say, the same whom she  
 Raised up beneath the old oak tree!  
 Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!  
 For she belike hath drunken deep  
 Of all the blessedness of sleep!  
 And while she spake, her looks, her air  
 Such gentle thankfulness declare,  
 That (so it seemed) her girded vests  
 Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts.  
 "Sure I have sinn'd!" said Christabel,  
 "Now heaven be praised if all be well!"

(ll. 370-82; *PW* 1: 228)

Christabel regards Geraldine with suspicion, vaguely aware that something happened when her guest lay down with her. She awakes with a sense of guilt and wrong, but Geraldine's beauty and "gentle thankfulness" reproach her for her suspicion and her hesitation in greeting the lady. Unsure whether she has suffered or done wrong,

. . . in low faltering tones, yet sweet,

Did she the lofty lady greet

With such perplexity of mind

As dreams too lively leave behind. (ll. 383-86; *PW* 1: 228)

"Christabel" was first published together with "The Pains of Sleep" and "Kubla Khan." In his preface to "Kubla Khan," subtitled "A Vision in a Dream," Coleridge says he has "annexed a fragment of a very different character, describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease" (*PW* 1: 297). E. H. Coleridge assumed this was a reference to "The Pains of Sleep." But that poem, however short, is not a fragment. "Christabel" is. Both have for their subject the dream of pain and disease: one describes it, the other dramatizes it. Christabel's experience in Geraldine's arms parallels that recorded in the confessional "Pains of Sleep":

But yester-night I prayed aloud  
 In anguish and in agony.  
 Up-starting from the fiendish crowd  
 Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:  
 A lurid light, a trampling throng,  
 Sense of intolerable wrong,  
 And whom I scorned, those only strong!  
 Thirst of revenge, the powerless will  
 Still baffled, and yet burning still!  
 Desire with loathing strangely mixed  
 On wild or hateful objects fixed.  
 Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!  
 And shame and terror over all!

Deeds to be hid which were not hid.  
Which all confused I could not know  
Whether I suffered, or I did:  
For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe.  
My own or others still the same  
Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame.

.....

The third night, when my own loud scream  
Had waked me from the fiendish dream,  
O'ercome with sufferings strange and wild,  
I wept as I had been a child;  
And having thus by tears subdued  
My anguish to a milder mood,  
Such punishments, I said, were due  
To natures deepliest stained with sin,--  
For aye entempesting anew  
The unfathomable hell within,  
The horror of their deeds to view,  
To know and loathe, yet wish and do!

(ll. 14-32, 37-48; *PW* 1: 389-90)

Geraldine is one of the "fiendish crowd" with which Coleridge was all too familiar. His contact with these demons left him with a sense of wrong. His guilt and

the guilt of the dream-creatures became indistinguishable. Ford, commenting on Coleridge's struggle with his guilt-ridden and guilt-producing dreams, notes that at times the encounters were so vivid and alien that Coleridge could not accept that they came from his own nature. At such times he felt the persuasiveness of Baxter's theory that certain dreams resulted from the visitations of spirits and demons (Ford 142).

In "Christabel," both the substantiality and the guilt of nightmare--so intense that supernatural visitation seemed a viable explanation--are literally embodied in the corporeality of Geraldine. Through physical contact, she casts a spell that gives her power over Christabel's appearance and behaviour and initiates a most material exchange:

In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,  
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow . . . .

(ll. 267-270; *PW* 1: 224-25)

The spell not only prevents Christabel from articulating what happens during her trance, limiting to natural events her "power to declare" (l. 273), but also brings about a radical change in her. The Conclusion to Part I tells us, in terms that recall St. Teresa, how beautiful and devout Christabel looked just before meeting Geraldine:

It was a lovely sight to see  
The lady Christabel, when she  
Was praying at the old oak tree.

. . . . .



Kneeling in the moonlight.

To make her gentle vows;

Her slender palms together prest . . . .

(ll. 279-86; *PW* 1: 225)

Juxtaposed to this image is an unspecified but horrible transformation in her appearance during the embrace. The "sorrow and shame" that Christabel will feel when she wakes up is manifested physically:

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)

Asleep. and dreaming fearfully,

Fearfully dreaming. yet, I wis,

Dreaming that alone, which is--

O sorrow and shame! Can this be she.

The lady. who knelt at the old oak tree? (ll. 292-97)

Furthermore. her countenance now contrasts not only with her appearance earlier. but with the sleeping Geraldine's:

And lo! the worker of these harms.

That holds the maiden in her arms.

Seems to slumber still and mild,

As a mother with her child. (ll. 298-301; *PW* 1: 226)

While Christabel suffers. Geraldine benefits from the contact. This exchange. combined with the parasitic imagery of the poem. supports the vampiric reading first put forward by Arthur H. Nethercot. The power and purpose of the spell. however. begin to be revealed in Christabel's behaviour the following morning. and suggest a parasitic

relationship of a deeper kind. When the women go to meet Sir Leoline, and he takes Geraldine in his arms.

. . . a vision fell  
Upon the soul of Christabel.  
The vision of fear, the touch and pain!  
She shrunk and shuddered . . .  
.  
Again she saw that bosom old.  
Again she felt that bosom cold.  
And drew in her breath with a hissing sound . . . .  
(ll. 451-59; *PW* 1: 230)

The hiss reveals more than a sudden intake of breath. Christabel at this moment reflects the very ophidian or demonic characteristics that she suffered in her nightmare's embrace. Bard Bracy's dream of a snake coiled around the dove named Christabel depicts the relationship between Christabel and Geraldine, identifying the stranger as the snake. But in Sir Leoline's presence it is Christabel who

. . . in dizzy trance  
Stumbling on the unsteady ground  
Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound . . . .  
(ll. 589-91; *PW* 1: 233)

Sir Leoline spins round to look at his daughter and sees the change in Christabel that occurred during the core experience as well:

The maid, devoid of guile and sin.

I know not how, in fearful wise,  
 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!  
 (ll. 599-606; *PW* 1: 233-34)

This description resembles the earlier one but fills in some of the details. Again the narrator juxtaposes Christabel's earlier demeanor with the one she displays under Geraldine's control after the encounter. Whereas Geraldine has "drunken deep / Of all the blessedness of sleep!" (ll. 375-76; *PW* 1: 228), Christabel has "drunken in / That look, those shrunken serpent eyes" (ll. 601-02; *PW* 1: 233). Christabel knows and manifests the mark of Geraldine's shame during the embrace, and does so the next day as well, just as Geraldine predicted in her spell. Under the power of that spell, Christabel has begun to take on Geraldine's deformity. Like the lady in the "Marriage of Sir Gawaine," who becomes a loathly lady under the enchantment of a woman seeking to gain place with her father, Christabel is being transformed into whatever horror--lamia, witch, ghost, shadow--Geraldine embodies. Geraldine and Christabel are exchanging identities.

The nightmare embrace has created what Ford calls an "ontological fracture"; as she explains, Coleridge's spatial dimensions of the mind create the potential for the mind to "split from aspects of its own self" (38). Christabel suffers a dislocation

between her “ego nocturnus” and her “ego diurnus.” the names Coleridge gives the self of dream and the self of waking consciousness (*CN* 3: 4409). Coleridge’s terms come later in his life, but, as Ford maintains, Coleridge was “always dimly conscious” that “dreams and the processes of dreaming threaten a coherent notion of the self,” and he long struggled with the problem of “how the presence of dreams can be so disturbing that dreams become antithetical to the perceived self” (50-51). The exchange of sin and guilt, the confusion of subject and object, wrongdoer and wronged that are features of nightmare--these are registered materially in the changed appearance and behaviour of Christabel.

Geraldine’s power to exchange identity will eventually result in an exchange of ontological status. Not only will Christabel absorb the nightmare/shadow deformities of Geraldine as Geraldine absorbs her beauty and vitality, but she will lose her place in the land of the living. Geraldine has become a “ghost by day time,” as Coleridge once called her (*CN* 2: 2207; [1804]); she is now in no danger of being driven off by the “matin bell” that sends ghosts back to the otherworld (l. 332; *PW* 1: 227). Instead, “Geraldine shakes off her dread, / And rises lightly from the bed” (ll. 362-63). Like David-Neel’s *tulpa*, she has become a “day-nightmare” and “tenacious of life.” She will assure her place in the waking realm by displacing Christabel.

This is the outcome suggested by the baron’s response to Bard Bracy’s dream. The bard reports that just before midnight he dreamed he found Sir Leoline’s dove, named after Christabel, fluttering and moaning in distress in the forest:

I stooped, methought, the dove to take,  
When lo! I saw a bright green snake

Coiled around its wings and neck.  
Green as the herbs on which it couched.  
Close by the dove's its head it crouched;  
And with the dove it heaves and stirs.  
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!

(ll. 548-554; *PW* 1: 232)

The dream occurs moments before Geraldine appears in the wood, moments before she takes Christabel in her arms and begins her deleterious enchantment. But Sir Leoline misinterprets the dream, putting Geraldine in Christabel's place. He turns to Geraldine.

His eyes made up of wonder and love;  
And said in courtly accents fine,  
"Sweet maid, Lord Roland's beauteous dove,  
With arms more strong than harp or song,

Thy sire and I will crush the snake!" (ll. 567-71; *PW* 1: 233)

It is at this moment that Geraldine looks "askance" at Christabel, casting her into a trance in which she hisses and mirrors Geraldine's serpentine characteristics. Geraldine, on the other hand, mimics the dove of Bard Bracy's dream:

And Geraldine again turned round,  
And like a thing, that sought relief,  
Full of wonder and full of grief,  
She rolled her large bright eyes divine  
Wildly on Sir Leoline. (ll. 592-96)

Geraldine is working to ensure that the Baron will identify her with the dove and

Christabel with the serpent. Sir Leoline already thinks Geraldine “sure a thing divine” (476) and is well on the way to believing “his daughter mild” a thing demonic. By the end of the fragment, the process of displacement has already begun. Sir Leoline, astonished and shamed by his daughter’s inexplicable behaviour toward her guest, responds in rage.

And turning from his own sweet maid,

The agéd knight, Sir Leoline,

Led forth the lady Geraldine! (ll. 653-55; *PW* 1: 235)

In “Christabel,” Coleridge has combined and transformed many elements of fairy tale, not least the loathly lady of “The Marriage of Sir Gawaine” and the blood-sucking serpents of “The Spanish Virgin,” both ballads in Percy’s *Reliques*. The loathly lady’s explanation of her condition suggests Christabel’s story:

My father was an aged knighte,

And yet it chanced soe.

He tooke to wife a false ladyè.

Whiche broughte me to this woe.

She witch’d mee, being a faire yonge maide,

In the greene forèst to dwelle;

And there to abide in lothlye shape.

Most like a fiend of helle. (2: 137-44; Percy 3: 20-21)

In Coleridge’s version, the false ladyè is herself a loathly lady “most like a fiend of helle” who emerges from the wood and gains a place at the old knight’s side by

displacing his daughter. "The Spanish Virgin" is a Snow White-like tale in which a noblewoman grows jealous of a waiting maid's beauty and has her thrown into a vault creeping with toads and serpents. When the maiden's moans and cries of distress eventually cease, the lady opens the door on a scene that must surely have impressed the author of "Christabel":

The door being open'd strait they found  
The virgin stretch'd along:  
Two dreadful snakes had wrapt her round,  
Which her to death had stung.

One round her legs, her thighs, her wast  
Had twin'd his fatal wreath:  
The other close her neck embrac'd,  
And stopt her gentle breath.

The snakes, being from her body thrust,  
Their bellies were so fill'd,  
That with excess of blood they burst,  
Thus with their prey were kill'd.

(ll. 109-20; Percy 3: 223-4)

Vampiric snakes, twined around the maiden like the mistletoe around the oak, like Geraldine around Christabel, like the green serpent around the dove, suck and strangle the life from their victims. This deadly, parasitic image seems to have combined with

related elements of folklore noted by Liggins:

Folklore has much to say about the marks placed by the Devil upon the body of a witch . . . about the withered bosom of a sorceress, and the ugliness of wicked beings, while Robert Kirk records what was apparently another popular explanation of deformity (in mortals) when he writes of "the damnable Practice of evill Angells" who sucked the blood and spirits out of wretches' bodies "till they drew them into a deform'd and dry Leanness." (99)

Sometimes physical contact with a supernatural being banishes the mortal forever to the otherworld (Liggins 99).

Coleridge, I believe, read or heard such tales and saw in them patterns or pictographs of his own experience. He frequently expressed states of mind dramatically or pictorially. When depressed he wrote, "I have, at times, experienced . . . an extinction of *Light* in my mind . . . . After I have recovered from this strange state, & reflected upon it, I have thought of a man who should lose his companion in a desert of sand where his weary Halloos drop down in the air without an Echo" (CL 1: 470-71). In a notebook he wrote, "Mind, shipwrecked by storms of doubt, now mastless, rudderless, shattered, --pulling in the dead swell of a dark & windless Sea" (CN 1: 932). In "Christabel," Coleridge has dissolved and recombined the personally significant elements of his reading to produce, in an exemplary act of the secondary imagination, a new fairy tale that figures forth the experiences he sees reflected in their fragmented surface.

In the same way, the story of Undine contains elements consistent with the



pattern of "Christabel," though critics who have detected the water-sprite's influence on the poem have been unable to define it precisely (Railo 263, Nethercot 91-92). The shared elements have less to do with Undine's watery associations than with the theme of ontological security. Undine acquired her place in the world of mortals through her exchange with a fisherman's daughter at birth. She lived among mortals and even married one in the hopes of acquiring a human soul. But when her husband lost his temper with her one day, his angry words banished her to the realm from which she came. Geraldine, too, has effected an exchange with Christabel in her search for human substance. But in this case it is the mortal who will be banished to the otherworld by the angry words of her father.

This ending, of course, bears no resemblance to the alternative endings allegedly projected by Coleridge himself and recorded by his son Derwent and his friend and doctor James Gillman. These are conveniently collected by Nethercot (41-43). Derwent reported that Geraldine was "no witch or goblin, or malignant being of any kind, but a spirit, executing her appointed task with the best good will." The sufferings she inflicted on Christabel were intended to bring about some kind of "vicarious" atonement on behalf of the distant lover (Nethercot 41). Gillman also claimed that "The story of Christabel is founded on the notion, that the virtuous of this world save the wicked." Christabel "suffers and prays" for her lover who is "exposed to various temptations in a foreign land." But Gillman goes on to contradict Derwent's version on the moral nature of Geraldine: by praying and suffering, Christabel "defeats the power of evil represented in the person of Geraldine" (41). Gillman's extended version of the ending, furthermore, has little to do with this alleged theme of vicarious suffering on

behalf of the wicked. Geraldine, who masquerades as Christabel's lover, simply disappears when the lover himself enters the scene with an authentic token of his identity (43). The wicked Geraldine is defeated but certainly not saved. The lover, on the other hand, does not seem particularly wicked, nor does Gillman's account indicate how Christabel saves him.

Just how much Coleridge actually said and how much Derwent and Gillman inferred we will never know, and their endings should not dictate our reading of the poem. As long as it remained unfinished, Coleridge could contemplate alternatives. The name "Christabel," in combination with the serpentine imagery connected with Geraldine, may have acquired stronger Christian resonances for him as he grew older, with the exchange between Christabel and Geraldine suggesting Christ's act of "becoming sin" for humankind. But this would only indicate how powerful an image Geraldine's twining embrace of Christabel was for Coleridge; it is, indeed, a picture suggestive of multiple meanings. But Coleridge also said in 1833, "I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind." He could not finish it because the "Idea"--"witchery by daylight"-- was too difficult to execute (*TT* 1: 409-10). Elsewhere, he refers to Geraldine as "a ghost by day time" (*CN* 2: 2207). Neither of these remarks seems to fit the projections reported by Derwent and Gillman, but both are compatible with the mixing of categories that I have traced in the fragment we have: a supernatural being, a creature of the imagination, penetrates the borders of daylight reality and acquires enough substance to remain--as difficult an idea to execute as to discuss.

The perplexing Conclusion to Part II, which seems, as Holstein claims, "at best

a gloss on the Baron's abrupt rejection of his daughter" (126). can now be seen as preparation for the banishment of Christabel. The third part of the poem would then have been "the song of her desolation," as Coleridge later suggested (*CN* 4: 5032; [1823]). Even the description of the child in the "coda" evokes the otherworld quality of an Undine and the fragility of the child's place in this world:

A little child, a limber elf,  
Singing, dancing to itself,  
A fairy thing with red round cheeks,  
That always finds, and never seeks . . . .  
(ll. 656-59; *PW* 1: 235)

But the difference between these stories and "Christabel" is that the forest, the otherworld, to which Christabel will be banished is the spectral realm, the world of dreams, shadows, ghosts, and demons. The many elements of fairy tale and folklore coalesce to form the very picture of the exchange of shadow for substance hinted at in a mystifying notebook entry: "Ghost of a mountain--the forms seizing my Body as I passed & became realities--I, a Ghost, till I had reconquered my substance" (*CN* 1: 523; [1799]). Like the *tulpa* of David-Neel's account and the shadow of Anderson's story, Geraldine acquires enough substance from her "seizure" of Christabel to become troublesome and rebellious, and even to do away with her creator and source. The parasitic imagery, from the mistletoe twined around the oak to the serpent twined around the dove, functions less to mark Geraldine as a vampire than to suggest the parasitic force of nightmare itself. Paul Magnuson and Matthew Brennan both remark that the red-lipped, leper-skinned Nightmare Life-in-Death in "The Ancient Mariner" is

a vampire figure (Magnuson 65. Brennan 41). Coburn maintains that Geraldine is the Nightmare Life-in-Death all over again. Both figures express the fact that the power of the witching imagination to produce substantial dreams diminishes the life of the dreamer. This was a fact of Coleridge's own experience, as he poignantly reveals in a letter of 1803:

with Sleep my Horrors commence. & they are such, three nights out of four, as literally to *stun* the intervening Day . . . . Dreams are no Shadows with me; but the real, substantial miseries of Life. If in consequence of your Medicine I should be at length delivered from these sore Visitations, my greatest uneasiness will then [be], how best & most fully I can evince my gratitude. (CL 2: 986)

The image of a parasitic serpent that robs reality of substance appears again in another poem. In "Dejection: An Ode," written shortly after the last portion of "Christabel," Coleridge describes the spectrification that occurs in the absence of the divining imagination. Without divine presence, which is apprehended through the "shaping spirit of Imagination," nature becomes a phantom world of "outward forms" (ll. 86, 45; *PW* 1: 366, 365). It becomes the world of apparitions in which materialists and experimentalists live. Dejection is a nightmare life-in-death and the poet tries to drive it away: "Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind, / Reality's dark dream!" (ll. 94-5; *PW* 367).

"Reality's dark dream," "Phantom or Fact," "the Nightmare Life-in-Death"--if these phrases convey anything, it is the unsettling interpenetration of reality and dream that seems to reduce life to a spectre. Wheeler astutely argues that Geraldine finally

represents neither evil nor repressed sexual desire but disruption “akin to the disruptive activities of imagination.” But, she continues, whatever the opposites we may wish to name, whether imagination and reason or some other set, for Coleridge they are not essentially dual but “‘two forces of one power.’ In modern jargon, we could say that oppositions inhabit each other” (“Disruption” 88). If we transfer these remarks from the theoretical to the experiential, they could not be more accurate. In “Christabel” Coleridge illustrates not a theory of imagination, nor even a theory of interdependent oppositional forces, but the lived disruption that results when one encounters one’s dream-creatures.

Coleridge claimed in the *Biographia* that “Christabel” “pretended to be nothing more than a common Faery Tale” (2: 238). This claim is at least half-true: “Christabel” is a narrative of supernatural enchantment that employs obvious elements of fairy tale. But it is hardly common. It is a fairy tale of the witching imagination, and the supernatural being who seizes a mortal and takes her place among the creatures of day is nightmare incarnate.

## PART IV

***Recovering the Supernatural:***

***Coleridge's Divining Poetics***

## The Place of Paradox

In "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" Coleridge rewrites mystery and visitation in accord with his knowledge of the witching time. But the witching imagination was not the only supernatural power with which he was acquainted, and the spectral realm was not the only supernatural dimension of his experience. While the witching imagination provided the content for these poems, the other faculty represented by the word "visionary" gave him the purpose. For Coleridge, the function of poetry was to habituate its readers to the Vast, to free them from the tyranny of the senses and the understanding that cut them off from Bright Reality. Coleridge's mystery poems instantiate his "divining" poetics, a poetics whose end is to recover the Supernatural by awakening the organ corresponding to it. His self-stated intention for the poems was to induce a "suspension of disbelief," a phrase that implies far more than an agreement on the reader's part to entertain the improbabilities the writer lays before him. It implies the disruption of the reader's "reality"-orientation. Coleridge pursued this project of disruption in the supernatural poems by portraying the paradox of the witching imagination, a power that frustrates the categories of discursive thought and, in doing so, may create a space for the faculty divine.

Coleridge's poetics cannot be separated from his awareness of and commitment

to Bright Reality. In an 1811 lecture on Shakespeare, he speaks explicitly of the close relationship between religion and poetry. In his opinion, a poet lacking a divine orientation cannot truly be called a poet at all:

an undevout Poet is mad: in other words, an undevout poet in the strict sense of the ~~word~~ term is an impossibility--He had heard of Verse-makers who introduced their works by such questions as these--Whether the world ~~was~~ is made of atoms? Whether [there] ~~was~~ is a Universe, or whether there is a governing mind that supported it: There were verse makers but it should be recollected that Verse makers are not Poets. (*LL* 1: 326)

This requisite devoutness implies much more than intellectual assent to a particular doctrine; it is a cast of mind, an awareness of the Supernatural dimension that suffuses the natural world. In this same lecture Coleridge describes this poetic cast of mind and the work it is able to do. The poet is not only aware of the Supernatural but works to free others from the domination of habit in order to bring them to the same awareness:

In the Poet was comprehended the man who carries the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood: who with a soul unsubdued, unshackled by custom can contemplate all things with the freshness with the wonder of a child & connecting with it the inquisitive powers of his manhood, adds as far as he can find knowledge, admiration & where knowledge no longer permits admiration gladly sinks back again into the childlike feeling of devout wonder.

The Poet is not only the man made to solve the riddle of the



Universe, but he is also the man who feels where it is not solved . . . .

What is old and worn out, not in itself, but from the dimness of the intellectual eye brought on by worldly passions he makes new: he pours upon it the dew that glistens and blows round us the breeze which cooled us in childhood. (326-27)

For Coleridge, a capacity for wonder is healthy and necessary. Although, as he recognizes, it is in practice often inversely proportional to knowledge and maturity, such inversion is not inevitable and should not be accepted as such. The wonder of life and creation is not the result of ignorance but of deep, intuitive awareness. It is our myopic habit of relying on the practical, self-serving faculties that diminishes the lustre of the world. The poet renews the world and is able to do so because he still sees, or feels, its vitality and mystery.

Coleridge re-expresses these notions in the *Biographia* when he discusses the purpose of *Lyrical Ballads*. According to him, Wordsworth assumed the task of revealing aspects of the ordinary world that are invisible to habit-driven and use-oriented ways of seeing. Wordsworth set out

to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (2: 7)

Coleridge's comments here and in his lecture sketch a poetics of recovery. The term "recovery" is Tolkien's, but his definition of it suggests a close interaction with Coleridge's principles, particularly as articulated in his description of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Tolkien writes:

Recovery . . . is a re-gaining--regaining of a clear view. I do not say "seeing things as they are" and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say "seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them"--as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity--from possessiveness. . . . This triteness is really the penalty of "appropriation": the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (52-3)

Coleridge and Tolkien both feel that habitual ways of seeing diminish the world. Habit apprehends only what serves its immediate purposes, and may eventually fail to really see at all. In an article on mystical consciousness, R. K. C. Forman also discusses habitual ways of perceiving and argues that they are related to language and its role in experience:

some language has a positive and shaping *perceptual* function. When I look at the cream-coloured rectangular box on my desk, I do not think

“cream-coloured rectangular object” but rather words like “computer” . . . . Part of my experience of that box involves the words with which I identify it: the word “computer” shapes and controls how I see, think about and interact with that box. . . . The sad truth is, I rarely even notice what colour it is, except when I am writing philosophical papers about perception. I have “automatized” my perception of this box, that is, linked up a perceptual object with a phrase or word in an automatic or habitual way. When we encounter the same thing over and over again, we tend to pigeonhole it without looking at it in detail; these are our automatisms. They allow us to save psychic time and energy, and “see” only what we expect or need to see. The categories in whose terms we “see” are determined by our set, concepts, context, needs, etc..

(“Capsules” 43)

Language is the ultimate labour-saving device. It organizes and domesticates the world we live in, making the things around us familiar and stable, highlighting only what is useful or necessary to our everyday activity. This is the process that Coleridge and Tolkien allude to when they speak of “custom,” “selfish solicitude,” “possessiveness,” and “appropriation.” It is what Wordsworth tried to counter by avoiding the “inane phraseology” of orthodox contemporary poetry, modes of expression that had become so entrenched and automatic that they no longer directed attention to anything but the poet’s familiarity with convention (“Advertisement”; *LB* 738). Forman explains that “there is an inverse relationship between automatized labels and sensory information” (47). When an object or experience falls within or is

controlled by one's expectations. one relies on familiar labels rather than "descriptive. sensory language." But if an experience "dis-confirms" expectation. one will use descriptive sensory language. The same kind of language can be used to de-automatize perception (46). The desire to de-automatize underlies Wordsworth's experimentation with language in *Lyrical Ballads* and his instructions to his readers in the Advertisement:

readers . . . should not suffer the solitary word Poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but . . . while they are perusing this book. they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters. and human incidents . . . . (LB 738-39)

As Wordsworth explains in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), the "plainer and more emphatic language" of "low and rustic life" was for him the means to recovering the "essential passions of the heart" and "the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (LB 743-44). He tried to refocus attention on the ordinary by using what he believed to be the language of truer and more immediate experience.

Tolkien and Coleridge also believed that recovery involved de-automatization. For Tolkien. "Creative Fantasy." rather than a particular kind of grammar or diction, provided the mechanism. In his essay he explains how fantasy frees the familiar from our possession: by placing ordinary everyday things in a magical world. or by giving them magical properties. it causes us to pay attention to them again and to see them with the eyes of a child (51-2). For Coleridge, de-automatization and the recovery of the ordinary is an essentially religious process. By echoing the words of Jesus--"eyes, yet

see not, ears that hear not"--Coleridge suggests that the perception of wonder and loveliness is a function of spiritual awareness. A "feeling analogous to the supernatural" is the thrill of a more-than-natural presence. Coleridge asserts that Wordsworth's task was to remove the veil of familiarity from the natural world in order to reveal the mystery in it--or, to put the same thing another way, to awaken the faculty capable of perceiving mystery in the natural and ordinary. The organ of such perception is the faculty divine, but the tyranny of habit, the automatized perception of the "intellectual eye," must be suspended in order for it to operate.

The work of poetry and of the divining imagination does not end with private visionary experience or personal enrichment any more than religion does. The recovery of wonder and mystery, the awareness of divine presence, has profound social implications. Poetry and religion are closely connected not only in promoting a fuller awareness of the "natural" world, but in healing the human world as well. Coleridge asserts that poetry shares with religion the common "object"

to prevent men from confining their attention solely or chiefly to their own narrow sphere of action, to their own individualizing circumstances; but by placing them in awful relations merges the individual man in the whole & makes it impossible for any one man to think of his ~~present~~ or his future ~~lot~~ or of his present lot in reference to a future without at the same time comprizing all his fellow creatures. (*LL* 1: 325; [1811])

Both poetry and religion, according to Coleridge, make people aware of the needs of their fellow human beings--indeed, they make pure self-interest impossible. Poetry, therefore, can be the means to rescue an enlightened age not only from "general

Irreligion" but from the self-centredness and alienation that comes with it.<sup>1</sup>

The function of recovery that Coleridge attributes to Wordsworth's poetry and to all "true" poetry motivates his own as well. Although the *Biographia* and the lectures in which he articulates this function were written much later than the supernatural poems, the notion was already taking shape in Coleridge's mind by 1797. In that important letter to Poole, he credits his imaginative ability to literature, to his childhood reading of "Faery Tales" and "Romances." His resulting love of "the Whole" was absent among the "*rational*ly educated," those who have arrived at the "same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of their senses." They "contemplate nothing but *parts*," and when they look at "great things," they see nothing, and congratulate themselves on their lack of imagination (*CL* 1: 354-5).<sup>2</sup> The letter to Poole foreshadows

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<sup>1</sup>This view of poetry's social function was taken up and articulated more fully and publicly by Percy Bysshe Shelley in "A Defense of Poetry." Shelley notes that, although "ethical science" teaches "schemes" and "examples of civil and domestic life," human beings go on hating and mistreating one another; it is not "for want of admirable doctrines" that they do so. Hence the need for poetry:

. . . Poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering [it] the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar . . . . The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry . . . . enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight . . . . (39-41)

<sup>2</sup>Just as Shelley develops Coleridge's notion of the social role of poetry and imagination, Keats echoes his belief in the limitations of "rational" thought. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey he writes the famous lines,

The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning . . . Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher

the poetics of recovery he outlines in his lecture on Shakespeare and again in the *Biographia*.

A letter to his brother George in 1798 does so even more explicitly. Here Coleridge expresses his own poetic purpose:

I have for some time past withdrawn myself almost totally from the consideration of *immediate* causes, which are infinitely complex & uncertain, to muse on fundamental & general causes--the "causae causarum."--I devote myself to such works as encroach not on the antisocial passions--in poetry, to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life . . . .--I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness--and because I have found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others--& to destroy the bad passions not by combating them, but by keeping them in inaction. (CL 1: 397)

As Coleridge sees it, the problem of his time, vexed as it is by wars and revolutions, is the absence of divine vision. Coleridge goes on to quote lines from Wordsworth that urge the cultivation of love for nature as a means to love, joy, and peace among human beings. A "visionary fondness" for the non-human world can become the antidote for human hatreds and abuses. He believes people must begin to see the world with all the

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ever < when > arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections . . . . (Letters 1: 185)

powers granted to them in order for their "affections" to be in "right tune" with the world and with each other. Coleridge does not wish to withdraw from engagement, but from combat. Or, as Tim Fulford says, his developing poetics is "not a retreat from involvement in social practice, but a retirement from political declamation"; Coleridge is setting out to reform society through language (*Figurative* xviii, 61). Peter Kitson, writing on the seemingly apolitical nature of "The Ancient Mariner," argues that the "very absence of political content is itself political" (197). By 1798, deeply disappointed by the failure of the French Revolution to create a benevolent society, Coleridge had lost hope in "political action" as a means to social transformation; he began to stress instead the need for "inner redemption" through the "contemplation of the divine presence in nature," just as the letter to George indicates (202). According to Kitson, Coleridge expresses his shift in attitude in a narrative of collective guilt and individual redemption through inner transformation (205).

But the shift in attitude recorded in the letter to his brother seems to have produced not so much a decision to urge the "contemplation of the divine presence" through his poetry as a desire to prepare the mind for contemplation. Coleridge says he wishes to "elevate imagination" and instill "visionary fondness" for the natural world. "visionary" here used in its positive sense as he later uses it of Böhme's faculty divine. Coleridge wishes to recover the divining imagination for his "*enlightened* age." Failure to use it will result in its atrophy, and its atrophy will result in a shrinking world. "untenanting Creation of its God," and limiting each person's concerns and conceptions to immediate self-interest. Coleridge claims for poetry, even this early on, nothing less than the task of "rescuing" the age through a transformation of consciousness, and he



claims this purpose as his own.

Yet a poetics of the divining imagination seems to be a contradiction in terms. The faculty is above sense, above understanding, above discourse. Coleridge himself says that it cannot be acquired through “rational” means (*CL* 1: 354). He quotes Plotinus to stress that it works “without words” and must be understood “in silence.” that unlike “discursive” knowledge,

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* 1: 241)

The de-automatization at the heart of Coleridge’s project of recovery closely approximates the relationship between words and wordless insight discussed by Forman. Forman argues that just as language can be used to “de-link” experience from expectation shaped by language, among mystics of the *via negativa* it is used to get beyond language and conception altogether to a free space (42). Steven Katz directly opposes Forman’s argument for “pure consciousness,” insisting that mystical “experiences themselves are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences” (5). Nevertheless, Katz also observes that mystics use language to transform consciousness: “in all the major mystical traditions, recognizing their real and undeniable phenomenological diversity, language as a psychospiritual means of radical reorientation and purification is present. . . . [L]anguage is integral to mystical practice” (Katz 15). Katz uses the well-known Zen *koan* as the most obvious example of such practice. A *koan* is a paradox or absurdity upon which the mystic meditates in order to break free

from propositional, discursive modes of knowing. The most familiar example of a *koan* is "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Katz explains the function of these paradoxes:

In posing the *kōan*, the master is *not* attempting to pass information of a doctrinal or dogmatic sort to his student . . . . Rather, the master is seeking to revolutionize the student's consciousness . . . such that it breaks free of and transcends the regulative categories of knowing and thereby is opened up to new forms of awareness . . . . Here language performs an essential mystical task, but it is not a *descriptive* task. (6)

Transformational language does not describe or inform in any usual sense at all. It is not propositional. In the same way, transformational poetry, the poetry of the divining imagination, need not--indeed, will not--attempt to discuss or portray the dimension to which it is attuned; it will work to raise the mind of its reader to a new level of awareness. If the supernatural poems are "about" anything, they are about the witching imagination, but only insofar as they portray aspects of its power and effects. And these provide a "means of radical reorientation." Approximating the function of a *koan*, Coleridge's treatment of the supernatural collapses the categories by which mundane "rationality" or discursive understanding works and so provides an opening for recovery.

Coleridge himself sets up categories of discursive thought--in this case the "either/or" of reality and delusion--as the crux of "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel." Explaining the "idea" behind his supernatural poems in the *Biographia*,

Coleridge writes,

the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in *this* sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. (2: 6)

These very terms--*supernatural*, *reality*, and *delusion*--are also the key terms in Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic. Although he does not mention Coleridge's poetry, his theory has direct applicability to Coleridge's problematized supernatural. Todorov begins his discussion with an excerpt that reveals the tension at the heart of the fantastic as he defines it:

Alvaro, the main character of Cazotte's tale *Le Diable Amoureux*, lives for two months with a female being whom he believes to be an evil spirit: the devil or one of his henchmen. The way this being first appeared clearly suggests that she is a representative of the other world. But her specifically human . . . behaviour, and the real wounds she receives, seem, on the contrary, to prove that she is simply a woman . . . . When Alvaro asks where she comes from, Biondetta replies: "I am a sylphide by birth . . . ." But do sylphides exist? ("I could make nothing of these words," Alvaro continues. "But what could I make of my entire adventure? It all seems a dream, I kept telling myself; but what else is human life? I am dreaming more extravagantly than other

men. that is all. . . .[sic] What is possible? What is impossible?") (24)

Alvaro "hesitates," uncertain whether his experiences are real, which would mean that sylphides indeed inhabit reality, or whether they are dreams. This ambiguity--"reality or dream? truth or illusion?"--is embodied in the supernatural poems and, strikingly, in Coleridge's phrases "reality's dark dream," "illusions apt. shadowy of truth" and "phantom or fact." According to Todorov, this ambiguity is the essence of the fantastic:

either [the character] is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination--and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality--but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (25)

Todorov distinguishes between illusion, "an error of perception," and "delusion." "Illusory" describes the situation in which "we did not know what interpretation to give to certain perceptible events." But the "delusory" is a product of imagination, an event that did not happen at all in the real, perceptible world (36). Although Todorov addresses the "illusory," the hesitation between the "real" and the "imaginary" seems much more central to his theory: his "fantastic" resides in the space between opposites and consists of the mind's restless movement back and forth across that space as it deliberates between mutually exclusive explanations. It "occupies the duration of the uncertainty":

Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature,

confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)<sup>3</sup>

Usually, Todorov observes, the uncertainty is represented in the text by a character who seeks an explanation for events, as in the case of Alvaro. Like Alvaro, both the Mariner and Christabel, although they do not pause to ask themselves explicitly whether spectre-barks or lamias exist, nevertheless feel the disorientation that comes with apparently supernatural encounters. They find themselves unsure of what is real. The Mariner frequently recognizes the dream-like quality of his experiences even as he accepts them as real. When at last he sees the "lighthouse top," he suddenly questions the relationship between his mental state and reality. Like Alvaro, he may well wonder inchoately if his "entire adventure," or even his entire life, has been a dream, the Nightmare Life-in-Death. A life of dreams or a dream of life are the alternatives Coleridge himself ponders in "Phantom or Fact." The questions Alvaro asks also articulate the uncertainties Christabel feels as she gazes at Geraldine after the nightmare embrace, disturbed by the disparity between what she seems to have encountered and the person she sees before her. Is Geraldine a wronged and helpless mortal woman? Or

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<sup>3</sup>Todorov defines the genres of the "uncanny" and the "marvelous" in relation to the reader's eventual choice:

At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous (41).

Applying his terms to "one of the great periods of supernatural literature, that of the Gothic novel," Todorov identifies the "supernatural explained" of Radcliffe as the "uncanny," and the "supernatural accepted" of Walpole and Lewis as the "marvelous" (41-2).

is she a malicious lamia or witch? Was that old, cold bosom dream or reality?

Christabel pauses for a moment before she concludes that she herself has committed some sin; her perplexity, however, remains.

In Todorov's theory, the ambiguity that constitutes the fantastic is eventually resolved and hesitation overcome. Often, in the end, the character wakes up or somehow discovers that he or she was or was not dreaming. Had Coleridge wished to convey only the "dramatic truth of such emotions" as persons believing their delusion real would suffer, he too could have taken his characters and his readers through uncertainty to arrive at clarity in the end. But Coleridge sustains the ambiguity: his characters never do "wake up." More precisely, they never regain the ability to differentiate or choose between the two states of waking and dreaming. The ontological fracture that occurs during the witching time allows the two states to intermingle. The Mariner is trapped by his story, compelled to repeat it endlessly and helplessly, its very ambiguity forcing him to try again and again to get the story right and find resolution. Raimonda Modiano says,

Like Christabel after her enigmatic encounter with Geraldine, the Mariner is cursed with the extinction of language. . . . The Mariner's world is full of sights 'to dream of, not to tell.' . . . [A]ll his life he *must* tell a story about an experience that has deprived him of a corresponding language, a story that will inevitably disclose its limitations. (43).

Christabel remains unable to articulate her experience and therefore (within the fragment Coleridge has left us) cannot "regain her substance." Unable to recognize the materialized form of her viper thoughts as the creation of her own psyche, she cannot

order it “hence” as Coleridge does in “Dejection.”

Because the Mariner’s and Christabel’s phantoms have penetrated reality, they can no longer be easily banished by the “matin bells” of waking discourse. Their encounters do not fit the categories of the language of consensus reality. As the morning bells fail to banish Geraldine to the darkness whence she came, she becomes “a ghost by day time” (CN 2: 2207), and a “real, substantial” torment (CL 2: 986). Similarly, because his phantoms have become fact and inhabit with him the world of objective reality, the Mariner’s penance never ends. These dreamers cannot decide whether their experiences are real or imaginary because their experiences have dissolved the boundary between the two categories. The either/or of Todorov’s fantastic simply no longer exists for the Mariner or Christabel.

According to Todorov, however, although hesitation is usually represented by a character, this is not always the case. Rather, it is “*the reader’s hesitation*” that is “the first condition of the fantastic” (31, Todorov’s emphasis).<sup>4</sup> It is therefore finally the reader’s decision that effects the departure from the fantastic into the neighbouring genres of the uncanny or the marvelous. But Coleridge puts the reader of “The Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel” in no better position than his characters--this despite his comments about “delusion” in the *Biographia Literaria* that seem to suggest the choice

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<sup>4</sup>Todorov’s fantastic “implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader’s own ambiguous perception of the events narrated.” He is speaking not of an actual reader, but “the role of the reader implicit in the text” (31). Coleridge, by withholding conventional eighteenth-century positioning devices, integrates his reader into the ambiguous world of the characters in a way that many of his “Gothic” contemporaries do not. Indeed, the status of their works as “uncanny” and “marvelous” is undoubtedly related to their “enlightened” position outside the historicized “secondary worlds” they present.

is obvious. Nor does he maintain ambiguity by withholding information, as does Henry James in *The Turn of the Screw* (Todorov 43). Rather, the choice between the real and the imaginary is impossible in these poems because the more one reads them with an eye to that binary, the more one finds that both explanations are true. The supernatural agents are the products of the witching imagination; they are also real. The phantom images and experiences so explicitly linked to altered, even delusional, states of mind are perceived by others and impact on material conditions. The imaginary *becomes* real.

The terms “real” and “delusion” are key to Coleridge’s “idea” for the poems, and seem to reflect the rationalism of his age—an age that, as Todorov says, “transpired . . . in a metaphysics of the real and the imaginary” (168). But even his statement in the *Biographia* evades opposing the terms irreducibly. Coleridge claims that he wished to capture “the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in *this* sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency.” But he does not define what sense “*this*” is. Real dramatically? Real emotionally? And what does it mean for a situation to be dramatically and/or emotionally real? Charles Lamb expounds with greater clarity the idea of emotional or dramatic truth in a letter to Wordsworth. He counters Wordsworth’s opinion that the Mariner should have had a “character and profession.” He believes that the “Trials” the Mariner suffers are such that would “overwhelm and bury all individuality or memory of what he was” (Lamb 1: 240). In Lamb’s view, the Mariner’s lack of distinct personality is emotionally true; it reflects the impact such miraculous



persecutions would have on someone who actually suffered them. if they were possible. The Mariner's dazed passivity therefore is not a fault of the poem but a natural and necessary component of that "internal consistency of reality" that Tolkien, for one, says is essential to fantasy (45).

But Coleridge himself does not simply say. "I set out to portray how a person would feel or behave if he were visited by supernatural agents." He obfuscates the matter by adding that they have been "real in *this* sense"--as real as if they had actually happened--to the people who believe they have experienced supernatural agency. Coleridge equates supernatural agency with delusion, but allows, however indirectly, that these "delusions" are in some sense "real." And it is precisely this undefined sense and degree of reality that he portrays in the poems.

No wonder many contemporary readers found these two poems impenetrable. From Southey's infamous description of "The Ancient Mariner" as "absurd" and "unintelligible," a "Dutch attempt at German sublimity" (Reiman A.1: 308), to the anonymous dismissal of the poem as the "strangest story of a cock & a bull that we ever saw on paper," a "rhapsody of unintelligible wildness and incoherence" (A.2: 714), to the vicious attack on "Christabel" which claims that "a more senseless, absurd, stupid composition has scarcely issued from the press" (A.1: 24)--reviews reveal that Coleridge's "supernatural" disrupts not only the commonsense either/or world of the characters but his contemporaries' reading habits and expectations as well.

Todorov's theory of the fantastic illuminates the ambiguity embodied in Coleridge's poems, and it foregrounds the hesitation such ambiguity causes. But in the end the theory stops just short of explaining the force of these poems because it does not

accommodate the middle realm that is, in Coleridge's view, the matrix of the supernatural. Coleridge's poems keep the reader in the space between opposites, but his in-between is the both/and of the witching imagination, not the either/or of Todorov's fantastic. The Coleridgean supernatural compels the mind to keep moving between two poles, unable to fix on one or the other because both are true.

The back-and-forth movement of the mind is a recurring motif in Coleridge's work. The most familiar example is, perhaps, his analogy of the water-insect:

Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name . . . . Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets . . . 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. (*BL* 1: 124)

The two "poles" in this passage are active and passive, not real and imaginary. But of special significance to us is the fact that Coleridge goes on to say this movement is made possible by an "intermediate faculty" which is "both active and passive," namely "the IMAGINATION" (124-25).

The intermediary power of the imagination makes thinking possible. Coleridge asserts elsewhere that certain kinds of mental activity can actually call up the imagination and take the mind beyond the discursive thinking of the understanding

altogether. In an 1811 lecture, he finds this process at work in series of oxymorons in *Romeo and Juliet*:

there is an effort in the mind when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites and leave a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other when it is hovering between two images: as soon as it ~~becomes~~ is fixed <on one> it becomes understanding and when it is waving between them attaching itself to neither it is imagination.-- (LL 1: 311)

“Hovering” suggests the same activity that Todorov captures in his term “hesitation”; the mind pauses between two possibilities. But in Coleridge’s example the ambiguity that causes the hovering is a paradox. Coleridge specifies that the imagination occupies the middle space between contraries while understanding resides in the fixity of either/or.

Coleridge’s description of “an effort in the mind” that leaves the mind in the “middle state” of imagination closely resembles George Kalamaras’ treatment of the poetics of paradox. In his book *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension*, Kalamaras argues that disciplined mystics have not been alone in their quest for transformed consciousness; poets too have used “discursive techniques . . . as a way of getting outside altogether of discursive holds on consciousness” and have “laboured to alter concepts of the ‘real’” (121, 105). A variety of techniques--metaphor, imagery, symbolism, paradox--may function in a way similar to meditative practices like the *koan*; they may begin “discursively” but proceed to frustrate discursive thought (105). He shows how Charles Bernstein, for instance, works to “dislocate the mind’s hold on the discursive quality of

language by introducing syntactical situations that can be read in multiple ways” (112-13). The result is “psychic dissonance,” which Kalamaras describes in terms reminiscent of Coleridge’s:

For an instant . . . the conceptualizing capacity of the mind is frozen, caught in a moment of suspension as it attempts to resolve syntactical dissonance. In seeking sense, the discursive mind must move both backward and forward simultaneously; within this disruption and paradoxical movement, a gap opens, a moment of illogicality that conjures an emptiness that dissolves conceptual understanding . . . . (114)

Coleridge, too, goes on to suggest that the “backward and forward” movement induced by paradox can create a gap in conceptual understanding:

These were the grandest effects of where the imagination was called forth, not to produce a distinct form but a strong working of the mind still producing what it still repels & again calling forth what it again negatives and the result is what the Poet wishes to impress, to substitute a grand feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image. (*LL* 1: 311)

Images and fixities are the work of fancy and understanding. Accordingly, Coleridge remarks elsewhere that we can learn from the mystics only “when we condescend to read their works without the presumption that whatever our fancy . . . has not made or cannot make a picture of, must be nonsense . . .” (*BL* 2: 235). Imagination, the intuitive power, can conceive of the imageless. Paradox, like metaphor in Samuel Levin’s theory, not only expresses personal vision, but creates a space in the mind of

the hearer; it forces us to conceive *of* the inconceivable.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the “feeling” to which Coleridge refers should not be taken to mean “emotion” as much as a non-conceptual mode of consciousness distinct from “thought.” As Otto explains, the numinous experience “remains purely a felt experience” because it consists of an overplus of meaning that cannot be fixed by the categories of rational language; it is not equivalent to “an emotionalist irrationalism” (59).

In the supernatural poems, the mechanism that dislocates the hold of the discursive mind is not the syntactical technique which Kalamaras finds in Bernstein’s poetry. Nor is it the use of oxymorons that Coleridge’s own quotation of Shakespeare identifies as conducive to imaginative effort. Rather, the mechanism that creates suspension in the supernatural poems is the structural ambiguity that Todorov finds in the literature of the fantastic. But in Coleridge’s poetry, the ambiguity resides in the intermediate realm where imagination and reality co-inhere, in which the supernatural is

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<sup>5</sup>Put briefly, and roughly, Levin’s theory proposes that metaphor results from a “novel thought” or alternative vision of the world that twists the language of consensus reality (98, 135). Expressions like “the laughing sea” or “the trees are weeping” ask the hearer to construe not the language, but his or her conception of the world (93-95). Levin distinguishes between *conceiving* and *conceiving of*, with *conceiving* being the “stronger notion” of the two (65). Thus, in the case of a laughing sea or a sad tree, Levin explains,

I would say that we can conceive *of* such “objects” but we cannot conceive them. We can focus on an area in our minds such that it delimits the space into which the concept of a sad tree would fit, but we are unable to fill that space with a concept. In the process of focusing on that area, however, we project a schema, an abstract model or framework which we take to be an implicit or potential representation of the “object.” (70)

Coleridge similarly holds that deviant expressions force us to imagine the unimaginable. And he likewise suggests, along with Kalamaras, that the effort to do so clears a space that conceptual understanding cannot fill.

both “delusion” and “reality.” The dimension of the witching imagination is the “excluded middle,” the both/and alien to logical discourse (Katz 6), a place of unresolvable paradox. Suspended between the opposed categories of the real and the imaginary that we rely on for everyday living, it provides a perfect *koan*. Like the sound of one hand clapping, the Mariner’s efficacious phantoms and Christabel’s corporeal viper thoughts are absurdities. The discursive understanding “hesitates” as it attempts to resolve an apparent ambiguity. It moves back and forth between the horns of a dilemma--“to believe or not to believe” (Todorov 83)--until hesitation becomes suspension, suspension between the poles of *real* and *not real* upon which belief and disbelief are predicated.

The reviewers who condemned Coleridge’s supernatural poems as absurdities were not, after all, so wide of the mark. Some provide astute insights despite their confused exasperation. One reviewer recognizes that the difficulty of the poems results from the blending of properties, the popular conventions of horror with “metaphysical mysticisms” (Reiman A.2: 745). Peacock likewise accuses Coleridge of combining the superstitions of country sextons and old women with “the dreams of crazy theologians and the mysticisms of German metaphysics” (“Four Ages” 16). Both seem to sense that Coleridge has transgressed the boundary between “vision” and the corporeal supernatural of fairy tale, ballad, and popular superstition. Charles Lamb, in his letter to Wordsworth, reveals an awareness of the interweaving of dream and reality in the poem but fails to recognize their interpenetration. Reacting to Coleridge’s addition of a subtitle to “The Ancient Mariner” in 1800, he writes,

I am sorry that Coleridge has christened his Ancient Marinere “a poet’s

Reverie"--it is as bad as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is not a Lion but only the scenical representation of a Lion. What new idea is gained by this Title. but one subversive of all credit. which the tale should force upon us. of its truth? For me, I was never so affected with any human Tale. After first reading it. I was totally possessed with it for many days--I dislike all the miraculous part of it. but the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery dragged me along like Tom Piper's magic whistle. . . . [T]he Ancient Marinere undergoes such Trials, as overwhelm and bury all individuality or memory of what he was, like the state of a man in a Bad dream . . . . (*Letters* 1: 240)

In calling the supernatural element "miraculous," Lamb decides that it is real within the world of the text, making the poem a "marvelous" tale by Todorov's definition. But he also feels the dream-quality of the Mariner's entire experience. He negotiates this both/and by saying that the Mariner's mental state during his "Trials" is "*like* the state of a man in a Bad dream."

Other contemporary readers grapple more directly with the problematic ontological status of the supernatural characters within their narrative world. One complains that the "persons" in "Christabel" "resemble obscure figures in a confused dream" (Reiman A.1: 33). Another tellingly exclaims that "Christabel" is an "enigma":

What is it all about? . . . Is *Lady Geraldine* a sorceress? or a vampire? or a man? or what is she, or he, or it? These are questions which we have alternately heard and put; but to which not even those who have thought

the subject worth more pains than ourselves. have been so fortunate as to hit upon a satisfactory answer. One friend suggests that the whole is a mere hoax--a silly problem without a solution.--and reminds us that "true no-meaning puzzles more than wit." (A.1: 268)

A hoax it is not, but, if one wishes to determine exactly what Geraldine is according to usually mutually exclusive categories, the poem is indeed a problem without a solution.

It is Hazlitt, however, who most shrewdly describes the paradox of "Christabel" and its effect on the mind of the reader. Intuiting that this poem and "Kubla Khan" both inhabit some middle state between opposites, Hazlitt begins: "The fault of Mr. Coleridge is, that he comes to no conclusion. He is a man of that universality of genius, that his mind hangs suspended between poetry and prose, truth and falsehood, and an infinity of other things" (Reiman A.2: 530). And although Hazlitt decides Geraldine is a witch, he complains that Coleridge does not clarify what she is about. Instead,

the effect of the general story is dim, obscure, and visionary. It is more like a dream than a reality. The mind, in reading it, is spell-bound. The sorceress seems to act without power--*Christabel* to yield without resistance. The faculties are thrown into a state of metaphysical suspense and theoretical imbecility. (531)

The confusion of dream and reality; a sorceress who seems to have only as much power as her victim gives her; a poem that bewitches the mind, throwing it into a state of suspension--these observations reveal the sensitivity of Hazlitt's reading despite his lack of sympathy with Coleridge's poetic practice. In "Christabel" Coleridge attempted not



only to portray “witchery by daylight” (*TT* 1: 410) but also to perform it, to bind the mind of his reader in a spell that would suspend discursive thought.

Coleridge’s famous formulation of the “suspension of disbelief” implies just such spell-binding. Even its more widely-recognized connection to “dramatic illusion” grows from Coleridge’s investigation of altered modes of consciousness. Todorov observes that “literature bypasses the distinctions of the real and of the imaginary, of what is and of what is not.” On this subject he quotes Northrop Frye: “Literature, like mathematics, drives a wedge between the antithesis of being and non-being that is so important for discursive thought. . . . Hamlet and Falstaff neither exist nor do not exist” (167). That literature itself constitutes an intermediate realm Coleridge was very well aware, but for him it was analogous to the creations of imagination during non-waking states. Coleridge explains in a letter:

Images and Thoughts possess a power in and of themselves, independent of that act of the Judgement or Understanding by which we affirm or deny the existence of a reality correspondent to them. Such is the ordinary state of the mind in Dreams. It is not strictly accurate to say, that we believe our dreams to be actual while we are dreaming. We neither believe it or disbelieve it--with the will the comparing power is suspended, and without the comparing power any act of Judgement, whether affirmation or denial, is impossible. The Forms and Thoughts act merely by their own inherent power . . . . Add to this a voluntary Lending of the Will to this suspension of one of it’s own operations (i.e. that of comparison & consequent decision concerning the reality of any

sensuous Impression) and you have the true Theory of Stage Illusion--  
 equally distant from the absurd notion of the French Critics, who ground  
 their principles on the presumption of an absolute *Delusion*, and of Dr  
 Johnson who would persuade us that our Judgements are . . . broad  
 awake during the most masterly representation of the deepest scenes of  
 Othello . . . . (CL 4: 641-2)

We neither believe nor disbelieve dreams. They simply unfold before our eyes, as it were, "real" in their own dimension. We do not doubt them, any more than we doubt our own experiences while we are having them. As Ford puts it, "we do not attend to our own reality" (23). The creations of fully conscious imagination likewise have a power independent of direct correspondence to reality. They exist and function on an entirely different plane to which the usual descriptors *true* and *not true* do not apply.

We can now see that despite Tolkien's dissatisfaction with Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief," his own "secondary belief" comes very near that concept. Tolkien explains his term by distinguishing it from Coleridge's:

What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful "sub-creator". He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or

stifled). otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed. (36-37)

Tolkien understands suspension of disbelief as a negative act, a conscious act of the will to ignore or play along with what we know to be false. If the secondary world has been made consistent, true to the laws invented for it, no “stifling” of disbelief is required. We stop attending to our primary world and “enter” the secondary world without making a choice to believe or disbelieve. It simply becomes a sub-reality for us, a world within a world, a sub-creation. Though not material, and not descriptive of the world of “observed fact,” it exists nonetheless (44). It is a reality of the imagination.

But Coleridge’s “suspension of disbelief” has nothing to do with “stifling” or “make-believe.” Coleridge’s notion of the secondary imagination includes that power’s ability to create “that which has no analog in the natural world” (Engell *Creative* 344). Clearly such creations call for a different kind of mental response on the part of the reader than do propositional or descriptive texts. Sub-creations require a suspension of the habit of seeking a tally in the everyday, empirical world. The “enlightened” impulse to legitimize the marvelous and supernatural by historicizing it, making it a mirror of “pre-enlightened” society, fails to recognize the imagination’s power to create its own world. Mrs. Barbauld’s legendary wish for a strong, explicit moral in “The Ancient Mariner” is another manifestation of the same “realist” impulse: if the

marvelous is not descriptive, it should at least be propositional and didactic.<sup>6</sup> Coleridge, however, wanted "The Ancient Mariner" to be a poem of "pure imagination" (*TT* 1: 272-73). He wanted his readers to suspend their comparing and categorizing powers and enter the space of imagination.

Coleridge's suspension of disbelief constitutes a temporary letting go of the world we know. One chooses, not to play along, but to grant the creation of imagination its own peculiar existence to which belief and disbelief, as far as they indicate correspondence to the "real" world, are moot. Only in this sense is the suspension of disbelief negative; it is "that *negative* faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment . . ." (*BL* 2: 134). This is witchery by daylight, the "enchanted state" that Tolkien calls secondary belief. The word "Reverie" which so irritates Lamb is not only a hint to the reality of imagination depicted in *The Ancient Mariner* but also a reminder that the poem itself inhabits a middle realm.

In the end, Coleridge's suspension of disbelief is more radical and more

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<sup>6</sup>Allan Grant reminds us that Mrs. Barbauld was involved in the larger project of replacing fairy tales with "pious books for children" (112). He quotes a letter from Lamb to Coleridge that echoes Coleridge's and Wordsworth's complaints about "rational" education and the modern child, and anticipates Dickens' Gradgrind:

Mrs. Barbauld[']s stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery . . . . Knowledge insignificant & vapid as Mrs B's books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge*, & his empty noodle must be turned with conceit of his own powers, when he has learnt, that a Horse is an Animal, & Billy is better than a Horse, & such like . . . . Science has succeeded to Poetry no less in the little walks of Children than with Men.-: Is there no possibility of averting this sore evil? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives fables in childhood, you had been crammed with Geography & Natural History? (qtd. Grant 112-13, my ellipses)

profound than Tolkien's secondary belief because it entails alterations as well as transformations of consciousness. For Coleridge, the ability to entertain the imaginary constitutes not "belief" but "poetic faith." As Coleridge declares in the closing words of the *Biographia*, religious faith extends beyond the limits of rationality: "Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and . . . Faith is then but its continuation . . ." (*BL* 2: 247). Faith is the "evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Indeed, the passage in the *Biographia* suggests that the sensory world, "the starry Heaven," should serve to focus the "Soul" so that it can attain this depth of insight. Faith is the ability to suspend the habit of relying entirely on the senses and the understanding to determine the real. As St. Paul says, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5: 7). Poetic faith, by analogy, is the ability to grant to "shadows of imagination" their own peculiar reality in the space between the *is* and *is not* of the senses and discursive thought. It is the ability to look up from our little circle of data to participate in a world that does not match the "real" world. Such poetic faith brings freedom. Coleridge claims that poetry

not only aids our imagination but in a most important way subserves the interest of our virtues for that man is indeed a slave who is a slave to his own senses and whose mind & imagination cannot carry him beyond the narrow sphere which his hand can touch or even his eye can reach. (*LL* 1: 325)

For Coleridge, then, poetry shares with religion the task of reorienting the mind:

It bids us while we are sitting in the dark round our little fire still look at the mountain tops struggling with the darkness & which [*sic*] announces

that light w<sup>ch</sup> shall be common to us all & in which all individual interests shall dissolve into one common interest and every man find in another more than a brother.-- (LL 1: 326)

Poetry accomplishes this social good not by teaching particular doctrines or principles. but by a process that might appear singularly unpragmatic. It expands the circle of a person's interest by requiring him or her to conceive of and contemplate something beyond his or her immediate, empirical horizon.

Coleridge claims for poetry nothing less than the power to free the mind from the tyranny of sense and understanding and to awaken the faculty attuned to "the Vast," the Bright Reality that cannot be empirically verified or definitively systematized. In the *Biographia*, Coleridge describes this faculty yet again in terms of space:

They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination . . . who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennae yet to come. They know and feel, that the *potential* works *in* them, even as the *actual* works on them! In short, all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit . . . . (1: 241-2)

These creatures leave room for wings and antennae not yet in evidence, rather than spinning cocoons contracted to the shape and size of their actual bodies at the time. Were they not to do so, their wings and antennae could never develop. They leave

room for transformation. The divining imagination is the “wingéd thought” of “The Destiny of Nations” and the antennae that reach beyond the body--it is an organ that requires space in which to develop. The paradox of dream reality is one way to stretch the cocoon of the mind.

Coleridge himself suggests the mind-expanding function of “The Ancient Mariner” through the epigraph from Burnet. This passage not only professes a belief in invisible things, however uncertain they may be, but also asserts the benefits of contemplating invisible and unverifiable, even imaginary, things that cannot be dogmatically categorized:

The human mind has always circled about knowledge of these things, but never attained it. I do not doubt, however, that it is sometimes good to contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of a greater and better world; otherwise the intellect, habituated to the petty things of daily life, may too much contract itself, and wholly sink down to trivial thoughts.

. . . (trans. D. Perkins *Writers* 405)

Although the passage first appeared with the poem in *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817, and in Coleridge’s notebook in 1801-02, he must surely have had it in mind when in 1797 he described himself as “habituated to the Vast” and those “rationally educated” as capable of seeing only “little things.” If he had not read it by then, he found in it an echo of his own thoughts, even his own diction, when he did read it. Significantly, the portion of the original that Coleridge leaves out of his epigraph is the portion in which Burnet recounts the efforts of dogmatizers through the ages who tried to categorize the beings of the invisible world (CN 1: 1000H and n). Coleridge’s selection seems designed to

answer the question that Burnet himself asks: "But of what Value are all these Things?"

The elaborate categorizations are of no value, but the contemplation of a world distinct from the little world of daily life is invaluable because it keeps the mind from contracting to petty things.

In his supernatural poems, Coleridge tried to recover the Supernatural for his age, not by moralizing or by describing it, but by suspending the understanding between the poles of *is* and *is not*. This is the place of paradox, the moment of the divining imagination.



## The Reification of Xanadu

Before Coleridge lectured on Shakespeare, or wrote the *Biographia Literaria*, or added the epigraph to "The Ancient Mariner," his divining poetics found articulation in "Kubla Khan." In his preface to the poem, Coleridge establishes once again the motif of dream reality, this time linking it to reverie brought on by "an anodyne." The preface tells us how to read the poem: it *is* a "psychological curiosity," as he says, but of a very ambiguous kind.

"Kubla Khan" lays bare aspects of vision as a phenomenon (or "curiosity") and also uses that phenomenon to express Coleridge's ideal of poetic activity: to create a reality of imagination which differs only in degree from dream reality and which will bring about a suspension of disbelief, a transformation of consciousness, in his audience. But as the dramatization of his divining poetics unfolds, an ambiguity at the heart of visionary experience emerges. In the successful execution of poetic activity imagined by the bard, the audience accepts his creation as a token of divine encounter and empowerment. A work that begins in an "opium dream" seems to end in revelation. The last verse paragraph suggests a divining poetics of a more direct, prophetic kind than the poetics of paradox, while the preface discounts any significance at all. As David Perkins says, Coleridge's introduction undermines "the power and potential sublimity of the poet" which the poem itself seems to assert ("Vision" 98).

This ambiguity in “Kubla Khan” captures Coleridge’s own hesitation, his inability to decisively accept or dismiss dream realities of the witching time as either revelatory or purely deceptive. “Kubla Khan” engages the problematics of visionary experience as much as it does the poetic process. It questions the relation of such experience to the Supernatural and, consequently, the relation of visionary poetry to the Supernatural. It anticipates the conviction and uncertainty indicated in the title of Coleridge’s 1817 edition of poems, the *Sibylline Leaves*. But “Kubla Khan” (under which title I include the preface and the poem) does not only expose Coleridge’s hesitation; it also embodies his solution. That solution is his divining poetics, a poetics that embraces intermediate spaces and employs uncertainty as a means to Supernatural awareness.

Unlike the historicizing prefaces of Scott and Walpole, Coleridge’s preface says nothing about the people or culture that form the ostensible subject matter of his poem. Nor does Coleridge cite his source in *Purchas His Pilgrimage* in order to legitimize any departures from reality within the poem. Indeed, the short passage that inspired “Kubla Khan” supplies no warrant for marvelous events:

In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground with a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant Springs, delightful Streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the middest thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure. (qtd. D. Perkins *Writers* 430 n2).

Coleridge identifies Purchas as his source in order to direct the attention of his readers

to certain “facts of mind” that transpired on one particular occasion. The preface explains his subtitle, “A Vision in a Dream,” and together they form a more extended version of the tag “Reverie” that Coleridge attached to “The Ancient Mariner.” While “a poet’s reverie” may be taken to indicate the poem’s status as a mere figment of imagination, which is how Lamb read it, the preface to “Kubla Khan” explicitly and very specifically claims that the poem is the transcript of a vision that occurred during an altered state of consciousness. Coleridge identifies the “secondary world” of the poem as the “somnial space” between waking and sleeping, rather than an earlier or exotic culture.

In Part II (B), “Encountering the Spectral Realm,” I have urged that we consider anew the credibility of the preface because it is consistent with others’ descriptions of ex-stasis and with Coleridge’s propensity for similar experiences. Considered in the light of the witching imagination, the preface claims more than “poetic inspiration” or “poetic genius”—tags often attached to it but usually understood as referring to some subconscious process that generates the poet’s ideas. The preface records an experience of a more literal and “supernatural” kind: the creation of a quasi-material realm that Coleridge felt himself to have visited. By focusing his attention on the passage from Purchas, Coleridge “recollectively abstracted himself from the sense-world,” as Hollenback describes the process, and “allow[ed] phantasms, images, and emotional states that arise from the depths of his subconscious or from other sources . . . to flood into his awareness in place of the physical sense-impressions from his eyes and ears” (196). During this state of consciousness, the imagination can create a domain in which thought and word become deed, image becomes thing.

We should therefore take seriously Coleridge's testimony that "all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort" (Preface II. 20-22; *PW* 1: 296). It is certainly corroborated elsewhere in his private writing. Ina Lipkowitz notes the connection between the "dream vision" of Xanadu and those to which Coleridge alludes in a marginal note on Eichhorn. Here he speaks of "Dreams during an excited state of the Nerves, which I myself experienced . . . ." He remarks on the "wonderful intricacy, complexity, and yet clarity of the visual objects," as well as "the noticeable fact of the words descriptive of these Objects rising at the same time, and with the same Spontaneity and absence of all conscious Effort . . ." (Lipkowitz 626). We should not assume that the verbal expressions arose in response to what he saw. In his preface, Coleridge reports that he felt the two, image and expression, occurring simultaneously, "parallel" with each other. In the marginal note, he says the words arose "at the same time" as the objects. Kathleen Wheeler observes that "in 'Kubla Khan' one of the most recurrent themes seems to be [the] process of 'thingifying,' a word which Coleridge used to indicate the close relationship between thought and thing . . ." ("Thingifying" 133). In light of Hollenback's theory and Coleridge's own "ghost theory," thought can be "concretized" or "thingified" in a most literal way.

Coleridge's description of his Xanadu experience matches his assertion in *The Statesman's Manual* that there are people who have experienced "dreams of a very different kind . . . of which it would be scarcely too bold to say that we *dream the things themselves*" (*LS* 80). Luther, as we have seen, provides a vivid example of concretization: the "Army of evil Beings" with whom he did battle "were no

metaphorical beings in his apprehension. He was a Poet indeed . . . but his poetic images were so vivid, that they mastered the Poet's own mind! He was *possessed* with them, as with substances distinct from himself" (*Friend* 1: 140). Like Coleridge in the lonely farmhouse near Porlock, Luther fell into "a trance of slumber" during which "what would have been mere *thoughts* before, now . . . shape[d] and condense[d] themselves into *things*, into realities!" (142). In the same way, Coleridge *thought* Xanadu and it appeared before him as a substance distinct from himself, a reality. The preface makes explicit the power of the witching imagination that Coleridge subtly portrayed in "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," the power to project and concretize--to "condense"--thought into thing.

To allow that the preface records an actual experience, however, complicates its relationship to the poem. Coleridge claims that the poem is a transcript of his vision, an almost automatic recording of the verbal counterpart that he seemed to himself to have "composed" during his reverie. Many readers have felt disinclined to accept this claim, among them Robert Southey. Coleridge's daughter Sara recalls,

My Uncle Southey had some good stories of dream verse-making. He was a sceptic on the subject. He thought that, on these occasions, men either dreamed that they composed in a dream (if the poem was good for anything, like *Kubla Khan*), or dreamed that their dream verses were good poetry. (Sara Coleridge 21-22).

Elisabeth Schneider offers more than the simple unlikelihood of composing in one's sleep. She contends that many of the travel narratives presented by Lowes as the unconscious sources of Coleridge's imagery were already synthesized and mediated by

the literary works of his contemporaries, and that Coleridge's obvious engagement with these works renders the claims of the preface implausible:

Coleridge's preface of 1816 placed the fragment of *Kubla Khan* on a solitary shelf where, as I think, it has misled us . . . about the creative imagination of genius long enough. The poem should stand where it belongs, in the literary tradition . . . . (237)

She exposes the many traces of contemporary literature in "Kubla Khan," from the "‘sunless’ caverns and subterranean rivers" in Landor's *Gebir* (120), to the appearing and disappearing paradises of impious despots in *Thalaba*, in addition to multiple references to domes, damsels, music, and other miscellaneous items between them. Warren Ober supports and furthers her argument by revealing significant parallels between "Kubla Khan" and certain passages in Southey's *Common-Place Book*, proposing that if the two poets were working together at that time as closely as Schneider suggests, they would most certainly have read each other's notes (415). One of these, which contains a possible source for the "wailing" woman, also contains an intriguing reference to ex-stasis:

Peti-suca, who had a power of separating his soul from his body, voluntarily ascended toward heaven; and his wife Marisha, supposing him finally departed, retired to a wilderness, where she sate on a hillock, shedding tears . . . . (qtd. Ober 417)

Schneider remarks that by the late eighteenth century, the theme of "the living man who is permitted to visit Paradise and who returns with a token as proof" had become a commonplace of "oriental" tales (116).

Such extensive “borrowing,” at the level not only of word and phrase but of theme as well, certainly diminishes the likelihood that Coleridge’s poem simply appeared to him in a vision. But it does not exclude vision as the origin, or perhaps the cause, of the poem. On the contrary, when the “borrowing” from other sources is considered jointly with “Kubla Khan’s” theme of “thingifying,” vision emerges as the subject of the work. Coleridge’s reading of his contemporary “orientalists,” and of the historical and travel literatures behind them, supplied the images by which he could articulate not what he “saw,” but the phenomenon of dream reality itself. By using his sources in this way, Coleridge simultaneously rewrote the supernatural once again, locating it not in the credulity of earlier or remote cultures, but in a state of consciousness. Part I of “Kubla Khan” (lines 1-36) mirrors or amplifies aspects of the experience Coleridge describes in the preface. The opening of the poem duplicates Coleridge’s mental activity during his reverie, for Kubla Khan, too, creates through the word:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree . . . . (ll. 1-2; *PW* 1: 297)

The choice of the word “decree” is no accident. Purchas wrote “In Xamdu did Cublai Can *build* a stately Palace” (D. Perkins *Writers* 430 n2, my emphasis). He conflated final and efficient cause, as we commonly do when speaking of the works of potentates: the historical Kubla Khan obviously did not build the palace with his own two hands; he caused others to do it for him. Coleridge’s paraphrase of the passage delineates this dual causality: “here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto” (ll. 13-14; *PW* 1: 296). The specificity emphasizes that the palace

was constructed in the customary fashion by labourers working with concrete materials. In the poem, however, Coleridge eliminates the word “build” altogether. Kubla Khan simply speaks the pleasure-dome and it rises up as a thing. Kubla’s creation is the ultimate speech act, and it reflects Coleridge’s experience in the spectral realm where the deed is accomplished in the saying and thought materializes as correspondent thing.

The peculiar ontological status of dream reality is conveyed by the suspension of Kubla’s palace above the ground:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure

Floated midway on the waves . . . . (ll. 31-2; *PW* 1: 298)

This suspension is generally overlooked by critics despite its similarity to features of Shedad’s miraculous palace in Southey’s *Thalaba*:

Here self-suspended hangs in air,

As its pure substance loathed material touch.

The living carbuncle;

Sun of the lofty dome . . . . (1: 387-390; *Poems* 29)

In *Thalaba* Southey also depicts a pleasure-house situated on a bridge:

A straight and stately bridge

Stretch’d its long arches o’er the ample stream.

Strong in the evening and distinct its shade

Lay on the watery mirror . . . . (6: 390-93; *Poems* 71)

Schneider speculates that “if Coleridge’s ‘midway on the wave’ was not a meaningless phrase, the idea of *midway* may have derived from these bridges [in the travelers’ narratives Southey used] that would actually have been reflected in *midstream*” (143).



H. W. Piper does not even allow for bridges; he places the dome firmly on the ground: “the logical sense of the lines is that the dome was alongside the river in the middle of its course, so that its shadow or reflection could be seen on the surface of the water” (67). Ober provides a more persuasive possibility based on a parallel from Sir William Jones’ “The Palace of Fortune, an Indian Tale” :

Soon she beheld where through an op’ning glade  
A spacious lake its clear expanse display’d;  
In mazy curls the flowing jasper wav’d  
O’er its smooth bed with polish’d agate pav’d;  
And on a rock of ice by magick rais’d  
High in the midst a gorgeous palace blaz’d;  
The sunbeams on the gilded portals glanc’d,  
Play’d on the spires, and on the turrets danc’d . . . . (qtd. Ober 421)

If, like Jones’ palace, Kubla’s is situated on a “rock of ice” in the middle of the water, it too would “cast its shadow ‘midway on the waves’” (Ober 421).

But mention of supporting structures, whether bridges or rocks, is conspicuously absent in “Kubla Khan.” Kubla’s caves of ice seem to be part of the dome’s composition, rather than its foundation: “It was a miracle of rare device, / A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!” (ll. 35-36; *PW* 1: 298). And there is no reason why a dome raised by magic could not hang “self-suspended” in the air, just as the bard in Part II (ll. 37-54) tells us it does. He says specifically that he wishes to “build that dome in air” (l. 46; *PW* 1: 298). Piper reads “in air” as indicating that the bard will produce a prophecy (71). George G. Watson surmises, “‘in air’ presumably means not

substantially but as a poem" (227). The bard's statement, however, might as easily mean "I would build that dome, the one in the air," as "I would build that dome, but I would build it in the air." Taken literally, the bard's specifications actually match and expand the description of Kubla's palace. The position of both buildings reflects the seemingly magical power of the witching imagination. Just as Coleridge's "things" rise up in the middle realm between waking and sleeping, reality and dream, Kubla's creation occupies a middle realm, between earth and heaven, and the bard's dome likewise takes shape in the air.

The Khan's suspended pleasure-dome, however, will not last. Impending war threatens the carefully created paradise. Significantly, the threat of invasion immediately precedes the description of the dome's suspended status and its miraculous joining of opposites:

Through wood and dale the sacred river ran  
 Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
 And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
 And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
 Ancestral voices prophesying war!  
  
 The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
 Floated midway on the waves;  
 . . . . .  
 It was a miracle of rare device,  
 A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

(ll. 26-36; *PW* 1: 298)

As Kubla gazes at the dome, the delicate hovering thing he has created by decree, the “real world” outside his walls begins to intrude. So with vision, when the outside world begins to reassert itself, paradise vanishes. The legendary “person on business from Porlock” may well represent the intrusion of the sensory world on Coleridge’s vision, the stone cast into still water that disperses the images lying on its surface of which he also speaks in the preface, rather than the interruption of the attempt to write it down once he was awake. For Coleridge, the vision would have begun to dissipate rapidly by the time he started writing. David Perkins notes that the reference to images on the surface of the stream in the preface parallels the shadow of the pleasure dome “midway on the wave” (“Vision” 100). Both references suggest the fragility of vision. In a notebook entry of 1803, Coleridge expressed frustration over the loss of another fragile vision: “overpowered” by the “Phaenomena” of a dream or reverie, he hurried to write them down, but they faded before he could do so (CN 1: 1750). In the case of Xanadu, as the vision fragmented and faded, Coleridge worked not so much to reproduce the vision as to weave the images that still remained to him into a poem *about* the vision--the sense of suspension, the dropping down--and he borrowed images and motifs from narratives of “false” paradises to convey his own experience of paradise created and lost.

The break between Parts I and II indicates this sense of dislocation. Not only does Coleridge the poet abandon Kubla and Xanadu just when a narrative is developing, he also suddenly shifts to the first-person pronoun. The “I” of Part II corresponds quite directly to the “I” of the preface. The bard Coleridge is now back on the ground, as it were, remembering (or trying to remember) the vision from the outside. The “damsel

with a dulcimer” is a figure of the paradise from which the bard has awoken. Damsels, especially musical ones, frequently appear in the “false” paradises of “oriental” tales (Schneider, Chap. 3 *passim*, esp. 139-40). Coleridge’s damsel represents by synecdoche these paradises, and through them the disorienting and tantalizing experience of dream reality. The bard cannot recall the maiden’s song; he can remember only that she sang one. To revive her song would be to recover the pleasure of paradise itself and the power to capture it in his own song:

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,  
 To such a deep delight ’twould win me.  
 That with music loud and long,  
 I would build that dome in air . . . . (ll. 37-46; *PW* 1: 298)

In the preface, Coleridge conveys both this disruption and longing through lines from his poem “The Picture”:

Then all the charm  
 Is broken--all that phantom-world so fair  
 Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,  
 And each mis-shape[’s] [*sic*]the other. Stay awhile,

Poor youth! who scarcely dar'st lift up thine eyes--

The stream will soon renew its smoothness. soon

The visions will return! 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. (Preface ll. 35-44; *PW* 1: 296)

These lines, quoted here in the context of vision and loss, suggest a process of recollection not unlike that elaborated by Hollenback. The youth must calm his mind and body, wait patiently with focused attention, and then the vision might return. The connection is strengthened by the fact that the "phantom-world" in the "The Picture" also includes a maid whose reappearance the youth longs for. In both the preface and the poem "Kubla Khan" Coleridge claims that if he could only bring back the vision, see and hear it again, he would be able to finish "what had been originally, as it were, given to him" (Preface ll. 46-47).

David Perkins remarks that "the extract from *The Picture* has a happier trajectory than the introductory note" since the extract suggests that the vision will return while the note ends with the images unrestored and only a few scattered fragments remaining in Coleridge's memory ("Vision" 100). Perkins also observes that the extract has a "happier trajectory" than the poem from which it is taken; "The Picture," like Coleridge's preface to "Kubla Khan" and the poem itself, ends in the loss of vision (101).<sup>1</sup> But "Kubla Khan" does not end so unhappily, as we shall see, even

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<sup>1</sup>Oddly enough, although Perkins links the youth and the blossoms in "The Picture" with Coleridge and the stone in the preface, and both sets with Kubla and the

though the vision *is* lost. Coleridge quotes only those lines of "The Picture" that provide a metaphor for the fragility of vision and its dependence on a particular mental state. But a juxtaposition of the two poems in their entirety hints at the transforming power of Coleridge's poetics which "Kubla Khan" as a whole embodies. In "The Picture" the pool reflects a woman of the external world who disrupts the youth's "vision" of her by throwing blossoms into the water and then running away. The youth can wait until he turns into a narcissus, but the "vision" can never return because it is not a vision, not a creation of imagination; it is a reflection of the material world. The youth, unable to renew his "vision" because it depends upon empirical reality, can only languish in the absence of the maiden or seek her in the wood. Coleridge the bard, on the other hand, though unable to revisit the paradise he projected, can use the fact of vision to approach paradise again.

How the bard expresses his desire to finish transcribing what had been given to him transforms "Kubla Khan," to this point a poem about the creation and loss of dream reality, into a work about poetry. By introducing the bard, Coleridge is able to dramatize his divining poetics and to indicate its relation to the witching imagination. The bard speaks of his own creative activity entirely in terms of the Khan's:

. . . with music loud and long,

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disruptive "ancestral voices," he does not connect the maiden of "The Picture" with the damsel of "Kubla Khan." He asserts instead that the damsel belongs to a different, earlier vision, and not to Xanadu. She is, after all, Abyssinian, and she appeared in a vision "once" (i.e., in the more remote past) (103). But a vision is not necessarily ruled by geographical accuracy (any more than Geraldine is confined to one particular supernatural identity). And "once," I believe, stresses dislocation and loss: upon waking, the bard feels the distance and utter irretrievability of the vision.

I would build that dome in air.

That sunny dome! those caves of ice! (ll. 45-47; *PW* 1: 298)

As already mentioned, critics tend to dilute the bard's assertion by reading it as a figurative reference to poetry or prophecy. But the concretization of thought and word recorded in the preface and exemplified by Kubla's creation of the pleasure-dome presents quite literally the process that occurs in the spectral realm. The notebook entry of 1809 which records the "self-power of the imagination" to bestow "*place & substance & living energy*" also speaks of the "offspring of an almighty FIAT" (*CN* 3: 3547). The bard's act would be a repetition of creation by *fiat*; he would create through song a reality of imagination. His projection would have its own peculiar species of existence, for "all who heard should see [it] there" (l. 48). The palace of the spectral realm would rise up before them, just as the images of Coleridge's "dream" rose up before him as things. They would see "*that sunny dome! those caves of ice!*" (l. 47, my emphasis).

Although only a wish on the bard's part, the drama he imagines enacts the willing suspension of disbelief at the heart of Coleridge's theory of dramatic illusion: the images and forms play out with a power all their own, independent of their relation to "reality" (*CL* 4: 641-2). To build with song is another variation on Coleridge's claim that he simultaneously "composed" a poem and a vision of paradise while in a "sleep" of "the external senses" (Preface ll. 17). The only difference between bardic and dreaming activity, as envisioned by the bard, is that he and his audience are awake as he builds his dome. Nevertheless, the audience are able to see independent of their senses. Through his song, the bard dislocates his audience's discursive hold on the

world. He enchants them, completes his witchery by daylight.

Part II of "Kubla Khan." then, provides a virtual tableau of Tolkien's sub-creation and secondary belief, and of Coleridge's secondary imagination and suspension of disbelief. Through the bard's use of the conditional mood Coleridge conveys his "dream" for poetry. The bard's object is to create a world within a world, and, through it, to effect a "radical reorientation" in his audience. They are to see a palace invisible to the bodily eye. The audience of the ideal poetic act would carry out no comparison between the bard's creation and the everyday world they live in. They would abstract from it no explicit moral lessons or propositions. They would simply contemplate a non-material and paradoxical reality--a sunny dome with caves of ice--in fulfillment of the poetics of paradox. They would be enabled to conceive of other dimensions, of Paradise itself. Through the words of the bard, Coleridge has successfully projected a picture of his divining poetics.

But, in fact, the imagined audience of the bard does more than conceive of other dimensions. They accept his creation as evidence of his visit to Paradise:

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. (ll. 48-54; *PW* 1: 298)

Although long since accepted as an allusion to Plato's *Ion*, these lines, when compared



to the parallel passage. show an important shift in emphasis. Socrates, ironically portraying the poet as possessed by the gods and uttering their words, stresses the irrationality of poetic composition:

For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves say; for they tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles. (Jowett 289)

In "Kubla Khan" the allusions to the *Ion*--milk, honey, the holiness of the poet--cannot be disentangled from the oriental motifs of creating and/or visiting paradise, or from the embedded question of the status of these paradises. In Coleridge's rendition of the "inspiration" theme this question of status is crucial. Through the audience Coleridge suggests the substantiality of the experience recorded in the preface. For

them the bard's creation functions like the "token" of paradise mentioned by Schneider. the flower that Coleridge muses upon in 1816, the very year of the poem's publication:

If a man could pass thro' Paradise in a Dream, & have a flower presented  
to him as a pledge that his Soul had really been there, & found that  
flower in his hand when he awoke--Aye! and what then? (CN 3: 4287)

To awake with a flower would demand a reconsideration of the nature of dream. What Coleridge ponders in this entry is the possibility of out-of-body travel to another realm that would transgress the accepted boundaries between dream and reality, subjective and objective. Through the audience in "Kubla Khan" he intimates that his vision might be just such a transgression.

But the interpenetration of dream and reality creates a problem of another sort. The paradise visited may indeed be "supernormal," to use Hollenback's term, without being "supernatural." Supernatural visitation, which in this case consists of the poet's visiting paradise rather than a supernatural being's visiting him, does not necessarily indicate an encounter with the divine world at all. In "Kubla Khan" the visit is the product of the witching imagination activated by a drug. Yet the bard has the audience of his ideal bardic act respond without the least awareness of this problem; they articulate no distinction between the paradise of trance and the divine realm. Their simplicity produces a tension in the work: the divine empowerment implied in Part II conflicts with Coleridge's elaborate attribution of his vision to reverie, to an "anodyne," to *Purchas His Pilgrimage*. The ambiguity that emerges reflects Coleridge's own hesitation on the status of vision. He stipulates, as we recall, two senses of the word visionary in his comments on Böhme:

For Behmen was indeed a Visionary in two very different senses of that word. Frequently does he mistake the dreams of his own over-excited Nerves, the phantoms and witcheries from the cauldron of his own seething Fancy, for parts or symbols of a universal Process; but frequently likewise does he give incontestible proofs, that he possessed in very truth

“The Vision and Faculty divine!” (*CM* 1: 558)

Coleridge carefully separates projections of the witching imagination from true apprehensions of the divine. At least he attempts to do so. But even here he equivocates, adding the remark, “And even when he wanders in the shades, ast tenet umbra Deum” (but the shadow holds God).

“Kubla Khan” reveals Coleridge’s sense that the two kinds of vision are not always easy to keep apart. In the preface, Coleridge indicates that his vision is only the dream of a peculiar state of consciousness; in the audience’s response, he hints at divine encounter. Given his own dichotomy, it cannot be both, unless the witching imagination both creates and reveals, unless the shadows it projects hold God. “Kubla Khan” exposes this wavering line between revelation and delusion. Is the paradise of his vision “false,” or is it, like Joan’s visitations, an “illusion apt?” Is the spectral realm after all the place where shadows of the Supernatural appear?

Coleridge does not imply the vision’s Supernatural status through the audience’s response alone, but through the bard’s diction as well. His choice of the word “build” is doubly significant. It indicates the continuity between the witching imagination and poetic activity, the fact that both create realities of their own through thought and word.

But it also invokes and reflects the mystical view that language can serve as a means to divine encounter. The *fiat* by which the Khan builds his pleasure dome parallels not only Coleridge's creation of paradise during the witching time, or even the divine *fiat* of Genesis 1, it also parallels kabbalistic beliefs about language. Steven Katz summarizes them as follows:

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet, out of which words are composed, are the fundamental building blocks of creation. The letters have ontic capacity and can be--indeed, have been--employed by God to create the world and everything within it. In this reading, the creation accounts wherein "God speaks" are taken with extreme, if original, literalness. (Katz 16)

To say anything about "the word" in relation to Coleridge is to find oneself confronted with his idea of the Logos. Mary Anne Perkins, in her book *Coleridge's Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle*, explains that for Coleridge the "reality of Logos provided a mediation not only between idealism and atomistic materialism or 'mechanistic' philosophy, but between all oppositions which had been misinterpreted as contradictions, or as mutually exclusive" (21-22). In explicating his idea of the Logos, Perkins traces his engagement with many sources: Greek and Neoplatonist philosophers, Philo Judaeus, Patristic theologians, Christian mystics such as Böhme, Christian Platonists, metaphysical poets, and, finally, German philosophers. Ultimately, however, the proem of the Gospel of John ("In the beginning was the Word . . .")

became for Coleridge "the most perfect expression of the divine Word" (12).<sup>2</sup> His idea of the Word as the "dynamic and causative" force within the "material universe" owes much to the "Greek *logos* principle" as well as to the kabbalistic interpretation of the Genesis creation story (which holds that God created the world through letters of the Hebrew alphabet) (62). Perkins notes that Coleridge's concept of the symbol as participating in, rather than merely representing, the reality it makes accessible owes much to hermeticism and shares "parallels with his Logos theme . . . . [T]here is a consubstantiality in the symbol which echoes the divine *homoousios*" (56, 48).

In light of Perkins' work, "Kubla Khan" may seem to be a poetic working-out of Coleridge's "Logos theme." But Perkins stresses that the Logos did not become a theme until 1805, around the time of Coleridge's conversion to the Trinitarian faith (16, 25). Kabbalism, however, as Tim Fulford shows, was a subject of Coleridge's reading throughout the 1790's (*Figurative* 52). I suggest that notions of word becoming thing, of the mind's power to create matter, to "thingify," were features of Coleridge's "dream" life and that he gravitated towards literature that described or paralleled those experiences. That these same themes seem to anticipate his later philosophy only indicates that Coleridge's theorizing was grounded in experience in a more concrete way than we usually assume. The dualism of mind and matter, spirit and body, could not accommodate the gradations in reality with which he was familiar or the presence of

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<sup>2</sup> Perkins notes that Coleridge found many connections between Philo's "Logos idea" and the Gospel of John (11), and that he "adopted" from Philo the "theme" of "God self-realized as Being in his Idea (of himself), the Other who is yet Self, the only begotten Son (Logos)" (174). Indeed, in a letter of 1818, in which he cites Philo's "Deus alter et idem," Coleridge remarks that Philo "has not been used half enough" (CL 4: 803).

God in the natural world that he felt himself to have apprehended. The Logos, as Perkins says, would become for him “the ‘Outerance’ of the divine Will” and the objects of nature “phenomenal ‘words’” (M. Perkins 35). It would also become the Word made flesh in the individual person of Christ (16). The Logos mediated between immanence and otherness. But it also provided a model of reality that could at least accommodate, if not explain, his experiences of the witching imagination, even if the ontological and revelatory status of those experiences remained problematic and profoundly disruptive.

That problematic status is developed in “Kubla Khan” through its parallels to kabbalism. Moshe Idel delineates the role of language in Jewish mysticism in terms that draw out these similarities. Even the key words of his title, “Reification of Language,” invite a comparison with Coleridge’s poem. For Jewish mystics, Idel explains, the Hebrew language plays much more than an informational role:

Letters are regarded as stones, . . . as components intended to build up an edifice of words to serve as a temple for God and a place of encountering Him for the mystic. . . . As God was able to create a world by means of letters, man is supposed to rebuild the Temple in his ritual usage of language. . . . The “masonic” aspects of the divine and the human activity reveal a hidden and mighty dimension of the Hebrew letters that underlies their mystical conceptions. The letters are understood to constitute a mesocosmos that enables operations that can bridge the gap between the human--or the material--and the divine. (43)

The obvious parallels between “Kubla Khan” and these tenets of Jewish

mysticism--Coleridge. Kubla. and the bard all build with the stones of language. the audience receives the dome as a symbol of the divine--are certainly more than coincidence. Fulford traces Coleridge's familiarity with kabbalistic doctrines and their impact on his beliefs about language through his marginalia and notes. Although often overlooked today, this familiarity was well known to Coleridge's contemporaries and became the object of ridicule:

Both Peacock and Hazlitt satirised Coleridge's interest in Jewish lore, Hazlitt seeing it as the logical extreme of his escape from deduction into mysticism: "if the labyrinths of metaphysics did not afford him 'ample scope and verge enough', he would resort to necromancy and the cabbala". As a result Coleridge was often publicly defensive about and critical of kabbalistic fancies. Moreover, although ostensibly *creationist*, Kabbalah, particularly in Christian versions, saw the world as *emanated* from God, so that Coleridge often criticised its pantheist implications. Nevertheless, he explored it privately and publicly with enthusiasm as well as scepticism. (*Figurative* 132)

Fulford notes that Coleridge's "1790s reading of Burnet, Enfield, Brucker, Cudworth and Purchas provided details of the kabbalistic system of formation of the world by God, in which God's creative powers were described as letters and numbers" (52). He had quite possibly read the *Zohar* in the very source he claimed for "Kubla Khan," that is, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (173 n.15). Fulford stresses the role of kabbalistic and other heterodox traditions in Coleridge's gradual formulation of a theory of "figurative language" in which language became "the means by which man can have unified

knowledge of himself, the world and God" (148).<sup>3</sup> He asserts that mysticism, particularly Kabbalah, stands behind Coleridge's definition of symbol in *The Statesman's Manual*, as well as his theory of imagination as expressed in the *Biographia* (140, 148). That theory, as we have seen, establishes a link between the divine and the human. Fulford holds that Kabbalah "demonstrated" for Coleridge "how the linguistic imagination of prophet and poet could re-create in its creative words the 'eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM', demonstrating the foundation of human consciousness (our 'I am') on divine consciousness" (148).

Curiously, Fulford leaves "Kubla Khan" out of his discussion even though he addresses other poems. John Beer, on the other hand, who focuses squarely on Coleridge's poetry, seeks out correspondences between kabbalistic writings and specific words and images in "Kubla Khan." He suggests that the river Alph, for instance, may be connected with the Hebrew letter Aleph, "the male element." The letter Beth is "the female element." A reading emerges in which Alph the sacred river becomes male, the

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<sup>3</sup>Mary Anne Perkins argues similarly that Coleridge sought to show that *all* language was fundamentally 'religious', participating in the divine Logos. . . . On the basis of his understanding of Logos as Word, he developed a theory of language which combined both naturalist *and* idealist insights, in other words, one in which the world of thought and the world of nature are seen as interacting and interdependent in concrete existence, reflecting the activity of the Logos as the divine Idea, the source of both nature and mind. (90).

But while she recognizes that kabbalism was one of the traditions Coleridge drew from, Fulford gives it much greater emphasis. For instance, while she shows that Coleridge's association of *Noumenon*, *numen*, and *nomen* expressed his belief in the power and presence of God and in Christ, whom he called "the *Name*, the *Person*, and the *Word*--of God" (84), Fulford points out that Coleridge's "frequent punning" on these terms sprang from a "kabbalistic tenet, that the names of God manifest his being or *numen*" (138).



caverns become female, and together they symbolize “the elements of dialectic creativity” (209-11). But neither Fulford nor Beer explores the possibility that kabbalism may have helped Coleridge articulate something that he experienced in a very literal way: the reification of language in the middle space of the spectral realm.<sup>4</sup>

Coleridge the bard conceives of his own activity as an extension of, or a participation in, this creation through the word exemplified by Kubla’s decree. His ideal activity is indeed “masonic”: the dome he would build would “materialize” not only between the poles of the real and the imaginary, but, as the audience response implies, between the human and divine. His dome will become a symbol in the kabbalistic sense in which, Idel explains, “an organic link” exists “between the symbol and the object it symbolizes” (44). This is also the Coleridgean sense: a symbol “always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative” (*SM* 30). The bard’s dome is “an edifice of words to serve as a temple for God and a place of encountering Him” (Idel 43). Coleridge’s dramatization of the poetic act here goes far beyond any notion of poetic “inspiration” in the conventional sense; he does not primarily portray poetry as generated by a “muse” or by subconscious creative processes. He questions, instead, whether vision may be Supernatural after all and whether the poetry that reifies vision may then become a means of divine encounter.

“Kubla Khan” is not Coleridge’s only gesture towards the possibility that poetry

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<sup>4</sup> If “the word *anodyne* sounds a little like ‘Xanadu,’ suggesting that Kubla’s palace is located in opium-land” (D. Perkins “Vision” 100), how much more does *Kubla Khan* sound like “Kabbalah.” Xanadu is not opium-land as much as the realm of the witching imagination, the place in which the reification of language becomes an experiential reality.

may capture the Supernatural. Only one year after Coleridge at last published "Kubla Khan," he published the collection of poems called *Sibylline Leaves*. No casual or clever literary allusion, this title indicates Coleridge's struggle to reconcile the weight of his spectral experiences with his conception of the Supernatural. It connects his poetry to a nexus of images of divinely inspired utterance.

The best known is the figure of the Cumaean Sibyl in the *Aeneid*. Virgil describes her frenzy as witnessed by Aeneas:

. . . . Aloud she cries,  
 This is the time; enquire your Destinies.  
 He comes; behold the god! Thus while she said,  
 (And shiv'ring at the sacred Entry staid)  
 Her Colour chang'd, her Face was not the same,  
 And hollow Groans from her deep Spirit came.  
 Her Hair stood up; convulsive Rage possess'd  
 Her trembling Limbs, and heav'd her lab'ring Breast.  
 Greater than Human Kind she seem'd to look:  
 And with an Accent, more than Mortal, spoke.  
 Her staring Eyes with sparkling Fury rowl;  
 When all the God came rushing on her Soul.  
 (Dryden 6: 68-79; *Works* 5: 529)

The Sibyl resists the god and must be subdued by him:

Strugling in vain, impatient of her Load,  
 And lab'ring underneath the pond'rous God.

The more she strove to shake him from her Breast.  
 With more. and far superior Force he press'd:  
 Commands his Entrance. and without Controul.  
 Usurps her Organs. and inspires her Soul.

(6: 120-25; Dryden *Works* 5: 530)

Virgil's Sibyl finds a close parallel in Coleridge's Joan, who endures similar prophetic seizures in "The Destiny of Nations":

And now her flushed tumultuous features shot  
 Such strange vivacity. as fires the eye  
 Of Misery fancy-crazed! and now once more  
 Naked, and void, and fixed, and all within  
 The unquiet silence of confused thought  
 And shapeless feelings. For a mighty hand  
 Was strong upon her, till in the heat of soul  
 . . . . .  
 Unconscious of the driving element.  
 Yea, swallowed up in the ominous dream, she sate  
 Ghastly as broad-eyed Slumber! a dim anguish  
 Breathed from her look! and still with pant and sob,  
 Inly she toiled to flee, and still subdued,  
 Felt an inevitable Presence near.

Thus as she toiled in troublous ecstasy,

A horror of great darkness wrapt her round . . . .

(ll. 256-73; *PW* 1: 139-40)

The visions of Joan's seizures, however, should not be taken literally; they are illusions apt, shadowy of truth. The witching imagination, the organ that generates intrusive supernatural encounters, is here portrayed as a link to Bright Reality, a connecting nerve that mediates between the discursive and intuitive faculties, translating apprehensions of the imageless into figures. These figures may reveal, but they also distort. They may be symbols of divine encounter, but they cannot be taken as direct visitation.

The prophecies of the Sibyl were similarly problematic for those seeking direct guidance from Apollo. Although the mouthpiece of the god, she was a notoriously unreliable medium. Before Aeneas meets the Sibyl, the seer Helenus warns him of her methods:

Arriv'd at *Cumae*, when you view the Flood  
Of black *Avernus*, and the sounding Wood,  
The mad prophetick Sibyl you shall find,  
Dark in a Cave, and on a Rock reclin'd.  
She sings the Fates, and in her frantick Fitts,  
The Notes and Names inscrib'd, to Leafs commits.  
What she commits to Leafs, in order laid,  
Before the Caverns Entrance are display'd:  
Unmov'd they lie, but if a Blast of Wind  
Without, or Vapours issue from behind,  
The Leafs are borne aloft in liquid Air,

And she resumes no more her Museful Care:  
 Nor gathers from the Rocks her scatter'd Verse;  
 Nor sets in order what the Winds disperse.  
 Thus, many not succeeding, most upbraid  
 The Madness of the visionary Maid;  
 And with loud Curses leave the mystick Shade.  
 (Dryden 3: 561-77; *Works* 5: 436)

This image of wind-tossed prophecies is the one employed by that other poet of divine paradise. Dante's vision of the Light surpasses understanding and cannot survive intact as it filters down into normal consciousness and the categories of language. Therefore, anything he writes down must be as fragmentary and distorted as the disjunctive images of a fading dream, as scrambled as the prophecies of the Sibyl:

. . . . Thenceforward, what I saw,  
 Was not for words to speak, nor memory's self  
 To stand against such outrage on her skill.  
 As one, who from a dream awakened, straight,  
 All he hath seen forgets; yet still retains  
 Impression of the feeling in his dream;  
 E'en such am I: for all the vision dies,  
 As 'twere, away; and yet the sense of sweet,  
 That sprang from it, still trickles in my heart.  
 Thus in the sun-thaw is the snow unsealed;  
 Thus in the winds on flitting leaves was lost

The Sibyl's sentence. . . . (Cary 33: 52-63; *Vision* 355)

Like Coleridge, Dante longs for recollection so that he might capture something of his vision in verse and so preserve a particle of the divine Light for others still to come:

. . . . O eternal beam!

(Whose height what reach of mortal thought may soar?)

Yield me again some little particle

Of what thou then appearedst; give my tongue

Power, but to leave one sparkle of thy glory,

Unto the race to come, that shall not lose

Thy triumph wholly, if thou waken aught

Of memory in me, and endure to hear

The record sound in this unequal strain. (33: 63-71)

By entitling his collection "sibylline leaves" Coleridge linked his poetry to Dante's and the Sibyl's efforts to capture the divine, efforts doomed to inadequacy and distortion by the nature of the medium. He linked it even to Joan's supernatural experiences. Tim Fulford remarks that Coleridge came to see the writing of the Biblical prophets as neither "the dictated word of God" nor "ordinary human invention":

Instead he emphasised the role of the prophet as writer, straining to record glimpses of the eternal in the finite world, his language distorting in the process. . . . Only where the pressure of the apprehension of the supernatural was great would the ordinary structures of language be reshaped to try to comprehend it. (*Figurative* 152)

But for Coleridge, as for Joan, there was a middle realm between the corporeal and

incorporeal, a language of experience that consisted of symbols and figures externalized as substantial realities. If these encounters too are indications of the divine, the spectral realm of the witching imagination might itself form a bridge, a “mesocosmos” not only between the real and imaginary, but between the human and the divine. By capturing those realities in verse, the bard’s activity would rebuild that bridge; his entire poem would become a symbol, participating in the dimension it renders visible, a vehicle of divine encounter.

But the dismissive preface remains. The tension between the clinical Coleridge of the prose and the Dantean bard of the poem, between the fact of witching creation and the uncertainty of divine revelation, goes unresolved. Yet “Kubla Khan” shows a resolution of another kind: the transformation available through Coleridge’s divining poetics. For Coleridge, poetry itself becomes the means by which he can embrace the ambiguity of vision without dissolving it. Through poetry he can transform the creations of the witching imagination into bridges to the Supernatural. It allows him to turn his delusion into intuition.

The witching imagination, at the very least, reveals the gradations in reality. It dislocates the dreamer, destabilizing the everyday sense that we cling to and according to which we decide what is possible and what is real. The creations of the witching imagination are paradox concretized. Poetry, by reifying the ambiguity of vision, brings together the “masonic” possibilities of language and the divining function of paradox. “Building blocks,” after all, do not work conceptually any more than a *koan* does; they “do not serve, in any way, as a channel of transmitting meaning; . . . [they] enable different types of communication, a verbal ones, that accomplish much more than

merely conveying certain trivial information" (Idel 43). Katz observes that in many mystical traditions language is conceived of as having "locomotive power." of "aid[ing] in mystical ascents to other worlds and realms of being" (20). Thus, "mantras, *kōans*, mystical alphabets and lexicons, ascent texts, prayers, the repetition of scripture, the recitation of religious poetry" all function as engines of locomotion, of ascent (24).

Paradox, a stumbling block to the understanding, becomes a stepping stone--if not to the divine, then at least to the faculty capable of apprehending it. Just as the bard's palace lifts the minds of his audience to an intermediate space between the earth and heaven, between the "real" and the "imaginary," so Coleridge's reification of Xanadu enacts his divining poetics: in "Kubla Khan" he rebuilds a place of paradox, a place between *is* and *is not*, where the divining imagination can conceive of the Supernatural.



## CONCLUSION

And so we come to the end of our consideration of Coleridge's poems of the supernatural, poems which certainly depart from consensus reality and may seem to be, therefore, works of "mere" fantasy. But, as Kathryn Hume remarks, an author may "see reality in terms other than the consensus; the result may be insight or insanity, mysticism or muddle, but what comes into the text will seem fantastic to readers" (*Fantasy* 12). Coleridge's three poems seem fantastic because they portray an experiential domain that is unfamiliar to most of us. They are fantastic in Todorov's sense of the term because they embody ambiguity: are the supernatural agents and events encountered by the characters real or not real? But the domain that generates these poems takes them beyond the fantastic, as defined by Todorov, to a place of paradox. In the present study, I have sought to explicate not so much the relationship between Coleridge's poems and the genres of the fantastic or the Gothic, but rather the relationship between his poems, his own supernatural experiences, and the mindset of his age.

Coleridge's encounters with the spectral realm fractured the surface of his world, often leaving him deeply disturbed and disoriented. But the mystery poems do more than portray the power of the witching imagination or express its effects. As Hume says, "literature of vision aims to disturb us by dislodging us from our settled sense of

reality . . .” (*Fantasy* 56), and Coleridge put to work in the service of Bright Reality the dislocations he suffered. In his treatment of the supernatural he collapses the categories of everyday reality, the categories we live by. Through these poems Coleridge hoped to suspend his reader’s disbelief, to temporarily break the mind’s discursive hold on the world, and so to create a space for the inconceivable.

Although “The Ancient Mariner,” “Christabel,” and “Kubla Khan” constitute Coleridge’s most explicit poetic engagement with literary supernaturalism and with the binary of real/imaginary on which it is predicated, the experiences that produced them continued to find expression in later, non-supernatural poems as well. And while we might wish for a happy ending, one in which his dislocations became less frequent and pronounced and his sense of peace and oneness more sustained, the “Epitaph” that he wrote for himself in 1833 suggests precisely the opposite. It recalls the nightmare of the Ancient Mariner:

STOP. Christian passer-by!--Stop, child of God,  
 And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod  
 A poet lies, or that which once seem'd he.  
 O, lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C.;  
 That he who many a year with toil of breath  
 Found death in life, may here find life in death!  
 Mercy for praise--to be forgiven for fame  
 He ask'd, and hoped, through Christ. Do thou the same!

(*PW* 1: 491-92)

This poem also echoes the lines of an earlier epitaph of 1803, lines Coleridge claimed to

have written in his sleep while "Dreaming that I was dying": "Here sleeps at length poor Col. & without Screaming. / Who died, as he had always liv'd, a dreaming" (*CL* 2: 992).

Both poems reflect Coleridge's predominantly unhappy acquaintance with dream reality. What the later epitaph shows, as the earlier one does not, is Coleridge's emphasis on faith and mercy. The ontological fractures of the witching time, which left him unsure of his own identity and nature, drove him to seek solace in the stability of the divine nature. So he declares in "Self-Knowledge" (1832):

What is there in thee, Man, that can be known?--

Dark fluxion, all unfixable by thought.

A phantom dim of past and future wrought.

.....

Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God!

(ll. 6-10; *PW* 1: 487)

By the end of Coleridge's life, the witching imagination had become what John L. Mahoney calls "the tragic imagination," whose poems "struggle in gnarled, nightmarish, seemingly disconnected images to evoke a twilight state just short of absolute negation" ("Tragedy" 122). This slide into twilight is also captured in the titles of Richard Holmes' two-volume biography of Coleridge, *Early Visions* and *Darker Reflections*. Many of the later poems, as Mahoney suggests, reflect the experience of "Dejection" and Coleridge's increased reliance on doctrine and faith in place of imagination and joy (120, 123).

Yet, even when the divining imagination is constricted by the coils of reality's

dark dream. Coleridge remains convinced of the Supernatural as a present and operative reality. Faith functions in the absences. And, if in their prosaic piety these later poems fall far short of Coleridge's divining poetics, they do reveal a marvelous constant: Coleridge still attests to the spectral in his efforts to impress upon his readers the authenticity of the spiritual. The period of his great supernatural poetry is over, but his hope of rescuing his "*enlightened age*" from "general Irreligion" remains. Through poetry, he continues to redeem the acts of the witching imagination.

Whether or not Coleridge was a mystic according to any formal definition I have not endeavoured to determine; what I have tried to show is that he was familiar with the supernatural in two very different senses of the word. He was often subject to the phantoms and witcheries of his own seething imagination--the kinds of experiences that others accepted as visions and supernatural visitations; but he also felt himself possessed of the vision and faculty divine--a power capable of apprehending Supernatural presence. Even when he wandered amongst the shadows of the spectral realm, the shadows pointed him to God. No wonder Holmes closes his biography with the words of Charles Lamb: "When I heard of the death of Coleridge, it was without grief. It seemed to me he had long been on the confines of the next world, that he had a hunger for Eternity" (Holmes *Reflections* 561).

But, now that we have come to the end of our exploration of Coleridge's supernatural realms, I, like Richard Hurd, may well say, "We are upon enchanted ground, my friend; and you are to think yourself well used that I detain you no longer in this fearful circle."

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