

“Kubla Khan” and the Art of Thingifying

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The Preface to “Kubla Khan”

An analysis of “Kubla Khan” is complicated by its extraordinary preface,¹ and also by the way the verse seems to fall into two sections, or two separate visions, the “body” of the poem (lines 1–36), and the last eighteen lines. For the sake of brevity one might refer to these final lines as the “epilogue.”

The preface to “Kubla Khan” acts to highlight specific formal aspects of the poem as opposed to the substantial content – the landscape descriptions and the Khan’s activities – aspects such as the origins of the poem in subjective visionary experience, the nature of the composition processes, and the ultimate failure to complete the composition due to certain circumstances. The preface distances the reader from the specific imagery and content of the poem by explicitly focusing his attention upon the poem as an instance of poetic creation, while raising a host of subsidiary issues for the reader to grapple with: the relation of art to dream and extraordinary states of consciousness generally, sources of art in the unconscious, the relation of images seen with the inward eye and the correspondent expressions, the relation of the resulting poem to the original vision, and the role of memory in imaginative activity. In addition, there are more formal aspects of the preface to which the reader may attend, a shift analogous to the shift that the preface encourages with regard to the poem, away from factual details and concern for their accuracy, toward structural properties, narrative voices, and the relation of the preface to the verse.²

The preface, like the verse, seems to fall into two sections,³ the first short paragraph (often left out in modern editions, and deleted from that of 1834), and the main body of the prose account. The first sentence reads

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somewhat like an advertisement to the poem, and makes two statements crucially affecting the reading of the poem: for it would never occur to a reader to approach the poem as a "psychological curiosity," instead of for its poetic merit, unless he had been so instructed (see moreover the prefatory remarks to "The Three Graves": "Its merits, if any, are exclusively psychological"). Nor does it seem likely that a reader would have thought "Kubla Khan" any more a fragment than any other poem, if he had not been told that it represented only a portion of a vision which inspired it.⁴ The preface suffers from a somewhat similar over-determination: one assumes that it is separate from the verse in an absolute way, and not integrally related to the poem as a work of art; and one assumes the author to be Coleridge reporting directly his own views about the poem.

Two points militate against these assumptions; the preface is composed in the third person narrative, so that the writer of the verse and the author of the preface seem to be distanced aesthetically; a persona is created for the preface writer, an alternative authority responsible for the views presented, and this indirect discourse immediately alerts the reader to the possibility of irony. Such a gesture is not unknown to Coleridge readers: in his two other most important works, "The Ancient Mariner" and the *Biographia Literaria*, he invents in the former a persona who glosses the poem, and in chapter thirteen of the *Biographia* he incorporates a letter "from a friend" at a critical moment, also to explain a fragment, namely chapter thirteen. The friend is of course Coleridge himself, and the effect is an ironic detachment toward the content of the fragment in order to emphasize another level of content and another attitude. The existence of the preface persona in "Kubla Khan" is further suggested by the sudden shift from third to first person in the last paragraph of the preface, and the statement of this persona suggests that he is meant to be taken as an editor: "As a contrast to this vision, I have annexed a fragment of a very different character describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease." He refers to "Pains of Sleep." This last sentence is also frequently left out of the best modern editions, as for example I. A. Richards's edition for Viking Press, or John Beer's Everyman edition. One loses the shift from the third to the first person, and by this omission is lost the equally important comment about the "Pains of Sleep" — namely that it too is called a fragment, and that it too is supposed to describe a dream. This puts a very different meaning on the use of the words "fragment" and "dream" in the early sentences of the preface, when the terms are used so broadly. For in what sense can one understand "Pains of Sleep" as a fragment or as a dream poem?

Not only is a persona created in the preface by the third person narrative; the referent of this "Author" is also not altogether clear. For instance, in the advertisement section of the preface, the persona uses the phrase, "as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned." But it is uncertain who

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"the Author" refers to in this first occurrence of the phrase. The tendency to assimilate this referent to the referent of future occurrences of the phrase "the Author" is admittedly strong, but not compelling. In the first instance it may mean "that Author," referring to Lord Byron,⁵ the "poet of great and deserved celebrity"; it may mean the author of the advertisement, "this Author"; or it may mean the author-poet of the verse lines. If we take seriously the idea that personas are important distinctions, whose perspectives are not to be confused with that of the "omniscient," physical man to whose identity we ascribe poetic productions, such discriminations are not unimportant. Taking Coleridge to be this omniscient author we must nevertheless grapple with the problems he creates for the reader in creating his third person persona. That is, is his account to be taken seriously, or literally, and does *he* really believe that "Kubla Khan" is a fragment, and important not primarily as a poetic production, but rather as a "psychological curiosity"? Or does the ambiguity of "the Author" not throw into question the authority of these "opinions"?⁶

The creation of a persona (or perhaps more than one) in the preface lends the prose a literary-fictional quality which is not out of keeping with its general style; its Gothic evocation of summers, ill-health, lonely farmhouses on Exmoor, confines, anodynes, travelogues, sleep and dreams, visions, and finally the extraordinary imagery of the last several lines before the lines from "A Picture." In comparison with the poem, the language is distinctly prose, and not as rich in imagery or as intensely compressed; but the wholly unnecessary detail of the description almost makes up for the imagery absent.

Such details are meant as, for example, "lonely" farmhouse, the sleep of "three hours," the "2-300 lines," "pen, ink, and paper," the person "on business from Porlock," being detained "above an hour," the "eight or ten scattered lines," and so forth. The informative detail is indeed more appropriate to the prose than a corresponding intensity of imagery might have been. A glance at the note attached to a manuscript copy of the poem raises questions as to the factual and fictional content of the longer account:

This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium taken to check a dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock & Linton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, in the fall of the year, 1797.⁷

With reference to the preface, the note adds some detail but leaves out much more than it contributes. The information in the preface conflicts with this cursory account in several respects, the most important perhaps being that the note reports merely a reverie of sorts, in which the poem actually was *composed* — there is no qualification on the idea of "composition," "images rising up in a dream with all the correspondent lines and no

consciousness of effort." Contrasting this relatively factual, literal, and dry account of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the poem with the actual published preface, one illustrates what the latter is not: it is not a literal, dry, factual account of this sort, but a highly literary piece of composition itself, providing the verse with a certain mystique. The preface itself is problematic in view of the extensive expansion from the note: to what extent are the additions to the preface mere interpolations and fanciful elaborations?

Although this question is probably unanswerable, it may not even be the important one to ask. Perhaps it is more pertinent to ponder why Coleridge chose to write a preface, and why he chose to include the details, facts or fancy, so minutely described.⁸ For example, there may be some more profound significance to the statement that the poet fell asleep while reading the quoted lines from *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (lines closely related in factual content to the first lines of the poem), than merely that it was the occasion of the dream. Coleridge may be ironizing by playing on the tradition that the Khan fell asleep and dreamt the plan of the palace to be built.⁹ Some connection between explicit sources and original transformation of those sources from other authors into new creations might be implied. Perhaps the chasm between such sources and the original use of them emphasizes the mystery surrounding the passage from ordinary consciousness into creative states.

Thus Coleridge himself would be giving the first hint that a tracing of the sources of his imagery would prove to be a fascinating way of becoming aware of the richness of the poem's meanings, as Lowes initially showed. But the problematic relation between the external world as stimulant, and inspiration, is being broached, as it is broached also in "This Lime-Tree Bower." Indeed the quotation in the preface of the lines from the travelogue relates to the first section of the poem as the manuscript note quoted above relates to the expanded preface. That is, the preface is a literary and poetic expansion of the manuscript note, dry and factual as it is, just as the quote from *Purchas his Pilgrimage* is expanded into the body of the poem. Did Coleridge then change "a sort of Reverie" to "a profound sleep, at least of the external senses," in order to emphasize and draw attention to the difference between *waking* consciousness and states of poetic vision, since the latter are more closely associated with the subconscious than mere reverie?¹⁰ The connection between dream-consciousness and poetic vision is of course an ancient allegory which recurs in medieval dream poetry, and which Shakespeare and then all the romantics take up. Of the romantics, Keats most persistently relates sleep or dream and poetry.

Coleridge might also have qualified the notion of composition in order to suggest the problematic nature of composition and its mysterious connections with the will and memory, and with the original vision of images seen

with the inward eye, but translated into linguistic expressions. The addition to the account of the "person on business from Porlock"¹¹ may be a fictional personification of the inhibiting factors interrupting the recovery of the whole: the likening of this person to a stone in the last sentence before the excerpt from "A Picture" may well cause a smile. The phrase "Person from Porlock" could certainly be a designed alliteration of "Purchas's Pilgrimage," the one marking the beginning, the other the end of the poem. The word "business" also had for Coleridge a very special connotation at the time (see Griggs i. 340-1); the "business" has to do with the spying to which Wordsworth and Coleridge were subjected by the "Aristocrats" (see also Shawcross i. ch. x). This took place at the time Coleridge says he composed "Kubla Khan," and at a time when he was trying to decide whether it would be wise to encourage John Thelwall to come to settle near him and Poole and Wordsworth. But the idea of spying might be applied to the faculty of reason as a censor of the imaginative faculty; thus the person on business personifies the spying, censorious reason interruptive of the imagination, the faculty uppermost in the minds of the "Aristocrats."

The Preface and the "Epilogue"

Apart from the creation of personas and the addition of details which romanticize the account and lend to it symbolic associations which turn the preface into a literary prose, instead of a factual, direct communication, (a prose riddled with possible ironies and explicit metaphors), the second major factor suggesting that the preface is to be intimately associated with the poem in an aesthetic sense is its connection with the "epilogue," that is, lines 37-54. In function, the preface and the epilogue exhibit strong similarities: both mention a prior experience in which some aesthetic activity is being described (the damsel sings and makes music, the poet dreams and makes a poem), and both make explicit reference to the loss of vision and the intense longing to revive it, and to build from it a "dome in air" in one case, and the poem's remaining sections in the other. In both the preface and the epilogue the presence of a narrator is much more evident, as distinguished from the omniscient, unobserved narrator of lines 1-36.¹² The juxtaposition of seen images and heard sounds in the epilogue is very like the images and "correspondent expressions" mentioned in the preface: in neither case is this problematic relationship explained. It seems correct to say that both preface and epilogue are distinct from the body of the poem in that both seem to refer to it; both are meditations upon visionary activity itself, whereas the body of the poem does not directly communicate these issues. It has a distinct and explicitly literary content. Neither the preface

nor the epilogue contributes to the landscape description of the three sections of the verse which constitutes the body of the poem.

Some subsidiary complications arise from this comparison of the preface with the epilogue, and from the aesthetic distance of the epilogue to the body of the poem. When in the preface it is stated that "the Author . . . wrote down the lines that are here preserved," as a consequence of a profound sleep, one may wonder whether the phrase "these lines . . . here preserved" refers to all fifty-four lines of verse, or only to the first thirty-six, thus excluding the epilogue from the vision. In fact, it is only the first thirty-six lines which relate to the quotation from "Purchas's Pilgrimage" in the preface.¹³ There is no mention of an Abyssinian maid, a dulcimer or song, or a visionary and a group of frightened beholders.¹⁴ But the mention of the dome and caves of ice in the epilogue suggests that the epilogue is not simply a second, separate vision, but that the music and song of the maid are connected in some mysterious way with the sunny dome of pleasure and the caves of ice. The intrusion of the narrative "I" in the epilogue contributes to the disassociation of the content of the epilogue from the vision of lines 1-36 described by an omniscient narrator, and makes it almost impossible to include the last eighteen lines in that particular vision. On the contrary, the "I" seems to take up where the preface left off, and to reiterate the concerns expressed there.¹⁵ That is, the "I" of the epilogue seems also to be the poet of the preface, but in a visionary state. In this reiteration, the vision mentioned in the preface seems to be mentioned again, but instead of describing the content of the vision, the vision is given a previously unacknowledged framework, a damsel with a dulcimer, who sings of Mount Abora, but also of Kubla Khan and the River Alph.¹⁶ The visionary then repeats the desire reported by the preface persona for the poet to revive the vision, explaining that a revival of the maiden's song would make it possible for him to build "that dome in air." The connection of the song and the dome suggests that the song is the condition and inspiration for the dome, and "dome in air" may be a way of symbolizing a poem, as "articulated breath," or organized sound, as music itself is.¹⁷ The omniscient narrator of the Khan's activities is not, then, the "I" of the epilogue, of the "Author" of the preface, but the damsel with the dulcimer, a design creating a dream-vision (about the Khan) within a dream-vision (about the damsel) within a dream-vision (about the "I" of the epilogue). That is, the narrator is symbolically the imagination itself, or the ideal poet, the ideal creator, omniscient, mysterious, and unknown.

The absolute distinction between narrators is impossible to maintain, however. The visionary "I" attributes a separateness to the character of the damsel by twice referring to the music as *her* song. He also intensifies her independence by inverting the word order of the sentence in lines 37-40, so that her existence is postulated as more objective than it would be if

ordinary word order were preserved. By placing the object, the damsel, first, he foregrounds it and emphasizes her reality, de-emphasizing her visionary subjectivity and distancing her from himself. He "externalizes" her to some extent. However, because she occurs admittedly in a vision, not only has she no independent existence apart from the persona of the "I" in any absolute sense, but her song is equally his song: she is a mere intermediary between the visionary "I" and the music. As an intermediate being, she is probably best understood as herself a personification of imagination, that "intermediate faculty," as Coleridge elsewhere identifies it.¹⁸ By creating such a separate, but not absolutely distinct persona, the poet manages to give poetic expression to the character of the faculty of imagination in its peculiar independence from his conscious control: his imagination is his and yet not his, as the song is his and not his. His control is tenuous at best, if not wholly illusory, and because of this lack of control, the faculty seems to have a will of its own, hence a personality or identity distinct from the poet.

It is precisely this independence and intermediary quality of imagination which Coleridge expresses in the preface. In the epilogue he has given the faculty a character of its own, but in the preface he does not dramatize in this way in order to express the nature of imagination. Instead he creates a dream allegory: he uses states instead of characters, and contrasts the waking state and the dreaming state. It might be correct to say however that although the dominant mode in the preface is the dream myth, characterization also takes place. The faculty interrupting or inhibiting imagination is characterized as the "person on business from Porlock," a vivid and ironic counterpart to the Abyssinian maid as imagination in the epilogue. To liken the "person . . . from Porlock" to a stone is to recall Blake's portrayal of "Urizen" (Your Reason?) as a stony, inflexible authoritarian figure. In addition to this persona, the preface-writer persona is created as a characterization of, perhaps, a "business-minded" or a censorious, literal-minded reader. In the dream state, the self has not conscious control over what it experiences; its creations, that is, its visions, seem "as it were, given." Things produced at the subconscious level almost always seem given, because the conscious ego is unconscious of any active role in their construction. Hence external nature, dreams, inspiration, etc., all seem to be independent of the self as known.¹⁹

Some independent reservoir or source for these images "which . . . rose up . . . as things" is implied, analogous to the damsel in function, but not personified: a myth of mental topography is used instead. The waking self, when it does finally regain some control over the psyche, acts merely as an amanuensis to this other state of being. There is only an implied character in the idea of a being dictating to the waking self, and in fact this "dictator" may best be *contrasted* with the imaginative, dreaming self or state, as memory. It may be in order to express this quality of imagination as beyond conscious control and the dictates of will and memory, and as having

sources in the unconscious as suggested by the dream allegory, that Coleridge decided to alter the description of the state from "a sort of Reverie" to "a profound sleep, at least of the external senses," and to qualify the notion of composition as he did in the preface but did not in the manuscript note.

Both the dream allegory and the persona of the damsel act to split the self of the visionary or poet into an imaginative, inspired self, and a self that merely recollects the former self. Indeed a further, more removed stage is indicated, where the poet is neither visionary, nor textmaker (where the memory and imagination seem to act together) but merely a reader, a passive self in comparison to the other two stages. The third person narrative of the preface expresses precisely this latter distinction: the persona who wrote down "the lines preserved" is not only distinct from the visionary self beyond the conscious control, in the persona of the Abyssinian maid; he is also distinct from the merely recuperative self who writes the preface. The aesthetic distance between the two would seem chasmic to the "fallen" poet, and he would seek to represent the distance by the distancing devices of personas and allegories of states. Thus the poem is not only about inspired experience, but also about the fall back into ordinary experience, and the relation between the two.

A further correspondence between the preface and epilogue creates another perspective in the poem for the reader. The complexity of the poem has already been said to include a level representing the poet's consciousness of his process of creation. The level at which the poet is twice removed from vision is the level of the poet as reader of his own creations, his texts, themselves products of vision.²⁰ The suggestion in preface and epilogue is that the poet cannot remain contented with this relatively passive state, and seeks to become a maker again, or even a visionary. The present is always only a portion or a fragment of experience as long as it is uninspired by imagination. Without the imagination to perceive connections the mind sees not totality, but parts. Hence in "unawakened" consciousness, in ordinary, "third remove" perception, all of the productions of imagination seem only portions and fragments in comparison with what the mind is able to remember vaguely that it once knew: something whole and entire, a vision of eternity. The text is only a portion of that eternity. It is in this metaphorical sense that "Kubla Khan" should be understood as a fragment: as an organic whole it is complete in itself; though, as a plant may grow to a larger size, lines may be added to increase it, but their additions do not imply that in its present size it is imperfect or incomplete in any aesthetic sense.²¹

The poet seeking to become maker again, and to raise himself from his merely passive state of reader or present spectator of past acts and visionary experiences, is a model for the reader who also dares not to remain satisfied

with observing someone else's past acts. Thus the "all" who cry "Beware! Beware!", these observers of the poet, seem to be negative models of reading, as they refuse to participate in his activity, and refuse even to allow him to communicate with them. They seem to treat him as a "psychological curiosity," and refuse to "see" his visions of sun and ice. As an audience, referring to the poet-visionary as "He," they repeat the perspective of the writer of the preface referring to "the Author." One must, on the basis of this analogy, wonder if the preface persona may not also be expressive of the limited perspective of a not altogether ideal reader. At the same time, the preface persona operates as ideal-reader, and this paradoxical superimposition, which also affects the "all who cry" (who seem also worshipful), will be discussed below. It is this ambivalence which makes it possible also to relate the preface-persona and the visionary "I," who is certainly *not* a negative model of reading. This "I" is, on the contrary, as positive a model of a spectator-reader as one could imagine, so active as to threaten by his participation to become a poet as well. The preface persona becomes for the moment an example of a not wholly unimaginative, but nevertheless reductionist reader. It is *he*, not Coleridge, the ironical, detached creator of this persona, who believes that the origins of the poem mark it as a literal fragment, lacking in aesthetic wholeness. He cannot see that because the poem is a true part of a greater vision, that it is at the same time a unity, regardless of whether more lines might have been added. One might argue that more lines could always be added: there is no determined correspondence between images and words, and sounds and words. Images and musical sounds are not words, and hence are not exhaustible by them; this is surely why the relation between the two is left problematic in both preface and epilogue.²² Moreover, the poem "Kubla Khan" may also be understood to be a fragment in the sense that it lacks the correspondent images visible to the inner eye in an experience of eidetic imagery, as the dream-text lacks the wholeness of the dream experience of sights, sounds, and colours.

The literal-minded preface persona fails to see these ramifications of the notion of fragment. He views the poem as of interest primarily not as an aesthetic work, since it is a mere fragment, but as a psychological curiosity, as does the epilogic audience. Thus he not only fails to see the symbolic significance of the notion of fragment; he also fails to see the dream account as a metaphor of poetic creation. This reader allegory is posed in both the preface and epilogue as a model to the reader of how not to respond to the poem, a gesture all too familiar to Coleridge readers.²³ The analogy between poet and reader suggests on the other hand a model of a participatory, creative reading, and is illustrated in the lines from "The Picture," included in the preface, in which it is clear that the poet's perspective and the reader's are analogous at certain times. Is the poor youth the poet or reader, or is he not both? Yet his role appears to be passive. But the stream mentioned

in the preface as an allegory of the consciousness sets the stream of these lines in a similar allegorical relation with the consciousness. The passivity of the youth's posture may represent his stilling of the conscious self in order that the sources of genius may become accessible.²⁴ Thus he gives up any illusion of control over his faculty of vision, and adopts an apparently passive posture, while his active imagination takes over and creates according to principles normally inaccessible to the conscious self.²⁵ It is clear that the superficially active reader who reduces, paraphrases, chooses amongst ambiguities, decides about paradoxes, and judges, fails to activate his imaginative being, and never closes the gap between the poem and his perceptions of it. The poem remains an absolutely separate and distinct entity, whereas the breakdown of the boundaries of the poem as exhibited by the preface and the epilogue, and the intimate involvement of the preface in the poem, suggest, too, that the reader's "preface," his account of the poem, is also not altogether distinct from some authoritative text, but actually contributes to the text as an entity. The account, then, is an integral part of the text.

In a sense, the preface makes it problematic to determine where the poem begins, and the epilogue prevents the determination of an end point. The epistemological claim being made is that one cannot decide the extent of the mind's contribution to the construction of objects of experience; hence the boundary between independent objects and mind is uncertain. The aesthetic claim corresponding to this epistemological one is that one cannot determine what is description and what is interpretation; the work of art as a work of art exists in the experience and response of the spectator to such an extent that when the reader thinks he is observing or perceiving the artifact purely or objectively, he is as mistaken as the philosopher who believes he can perceive a thing-in-itself. The challenging of the view that thought and thing are absolutely distinct entities is encouraged at both the aesthetic and epistemological levels of the poem. As Coleridge constantly insists, it is not necessary to divide in order to distinguish: thought and thing are different, but not essentially different. Moreover, they may only be facts of experience, not of reality, in the absolute sense (on the "outness prejudice" see Shawcross i. 177-9).

Because of the equally vague boundary between the "vision in a dream," and the meditations about it, the certain line distinguishing illusion and reality is dissolved: the border between art and reality has already been shattered as the reader realizes that he mistakes his responses for the text. The distinction between poet and reader erased in the lines from "A Picture," quoted in the preface, also emphasizes this breakdown between art and reality; and the mixing up of Coleridge and his ironic persona in the preface breaks down the distinction between poet and reader, or at least makes it less than certain where the boundaries lie and what exactly the

distinctions in roles are. The *perception* involved, for example, in reading, is suggested to be analogous to the activity of creating artifacts, when reader and poet are mixed up together, an analogy expressed by the distinction between primary and secondary imagination. For in this distinction, Coleridge insists that perceptual processes (such as reading) are fundamentally creative, imaginative experiences.

The Perceptual 'Art of Thingifying'

Coleridge believed that the processes of construction involved in artistic making were analogues of basic perceptual processes, but operating at a secondary level. That is, art uses as its materials the products of perception, and builds out of them new, higher order cultural "things." Because art operates at a secondary level, it in effect mirrors the primary level production of material things, or perceptual objects, and can be a source of knowledge about those primary constructive modes indirectly through an analysis of artistic production. When Coleridge investigates the artistic process of making, he is able to draw an analogy to basic perception, and to psychological production. By adopting a transcendental idealist posture, he insists that the mind is crucially active in the perception of the world, and is not passively receiving already formed objects that impress their fixed, stable and independently existing structures on the mind. Hence, when the preface writer states that "Kubla Khan" is of interest primarily as a "psychological curiosity," it is possible to understand that phrase as an indication that the poem is not only interesting poetically, but also as a source of knowledge about the mysterious processes of perception, which it mirrors as an artifact.

The productions of works of art, that is, the transformation of subjective, internal experiences into external, public objects, is a familiar experience, if not at first hand then at a removed perspective. We do not easily forget that art products were not always things, but results of mind externalizing subjective experiences. In "Kubla Khan" one of the most recurrent themes seems to be this process of "thingifying," a word which Coleridge used to indicate the close relationship between thought and thing (and correlatively process and product, mind and nature, self and other).²⁶ The main interest in the preface is the process of making the dream or vision into a thing; in the epilogue the visionary wants to make the music into a more permanent "dome in air" by reviving within him the Abyssinian maid's song; the damsel gives expression to her feelings about Mount Abora in "symphony and song"; in the first half of the poem, Kubla Khan has a pleasure dome built according to his idea; and even in the second half of the poem, nature seems to be described as externalizing herself both by flinging up the sacred river

on to the surface of the earth for a few miles before it sinks back into her inner world, and also by forcing great fragments, "dancing rocks" into the air. In each case the objects made begin their existence by being "flung forth" or externalized: they were not always there, but are products from another inner world. Not only works of art, but various objects are here presented as erupting from a subterranean world. Nature and culture are described as analogues. Indeed, it is not even clear in lines 1-11 which of the images are part of Kubla's design and which are nature.

In all of these examples there is an ambivalence between activity and passivity, an ambivalence central to a theory of mind as active or passive. Kubla Khan decrees the dome and gardens, but does he actively engage in the construction of it? Does the damsel act merely as the instrument performing an already composed music and song, or is she creating her song? Is the vision of the visionary in the epilogue a creation of his, or is he receiving it in a passive stance; and in what sense would he build the dome from the damsel's music, revived *within* himself? Would she somehow *give* it to him? Clearly this ambivalence is most explicit in the preface in the qualifications surrounding the notion of composition, and more generally in the dream allegory. It is repeated in the quoted lines from "A Picture": for if "now once more/The pool becomes a mirror," then the observer *makes* the image reflected, and thus his function is hardly altogether passive. In each case, the ambivalence between the active and passive roles seems to foreground once again the central mystery surrounding aesthetic creation: to what extent is art the result of inspiration, or forces beyond conscious control, and to what extent must the artist consciously guide this inspiration through decision, judgment, and technique acquired by practice?

The poem makes a gesture at a kind of solution, by seeming to indicate that whatever the degree of interaction, it is evident that the conscious ego must to a large extent remain in a state of stillness in order for unconscious sources of genius to awaken and begin to express themselves through the ego as instrument and not as source of the inspiration. Thus "Kubla Khan" is not to be understood as an anomaly, but as a result of the ideal mode of production. That is, genius speaks so fully and coherently that no completing acts on the part of conscious man are needed. The author's genius is perfectly integrated with his conscious mind in this ideal production, and no arbitrary, merely conscious gestures are made; the conscious is always interpenetrated by an intuition of its appropriateness. By writing the preface, Coleridge emphasized the importance of the integration of the passive and active, of the conscious and the unconscious, and reversed the common notion of what constitutes activity in art.²⁷ The preponderantly active part must be given to the unconscious, while the conscious accepts a subordinate, though integrated, role. The presence of the preface, however, reaffirms the view of art not as a merely unconscious outpouring of unreflective

feeling, but as a highly self-conscious activity. The author is deeply impressed by his paradoxical position: his loss of self-control as he usually understands it; his subjection to this power seeming to be his, and yet more than him; his suspension of conscious intention at the same time that he is observing himself acting, yet not acting, or intending by means of intuition and not arbitrarily.

By bringing out this ambivalence in the meaning of "active" in artistic processes, Coleridge implicates the reader's role as well, as the analogy so vividly expressed in the lines from "A Picture" suggests. The reader as perceiver of the poem must participate and be active or the object will remain an entirely separate entity from him, never assimilated into his fabric of experience. Clearly it must be an activity guided by intelligence and creative response. And for this to occur, the conscious self must in reading subordinate itself to some intuitive guidance, to some genial stillness, while the artifact works upon him to awaken his imaginative faculty. Poet and reader roles are compared in order to emphasize this similarity in the kind of activity required for catching a glimpse of the vision that the work of art tries to embody.

If art mirrors perception, however, this analogy must be drawn out in its implications not only for reading as a type of perception, but for the production of things as products of perception. Coleridge explains that "to think is to thingify." But to perceive was also originally to thingify. When we think, we delimit the boundaries of concepts, and discriminate distinctions. But for Coleridge, culture, the world of thought, of art, of science, and all the objects of culture are no more dependent upon perception than the world of nature, as we know it. Objects perceived by the mind can never be known independently of the perception of them, and this general ontological point is enlightening for an understanding of art from the point of view of both the spectator and the artist. Since there is no way of achieving certainty as to the nature of the object in itself, its familiar objectivity must be understood as a purely inter-subjective independence. Primary imagination, that is, perception, reveals its principles of organization and construction in its products because, like art, it constructs them according to those inner principles.

Landscape and the Imagination

The analogy between art and perception or poet and reader is expressed by the distinction between primary and secondary imagination, and this distinction may be seen to be functioning as an explicit metaphor in the body of the poem, while in the preface and epilogue it is only implied. For in the preface and epilogue the problem foregrounded is the relation of the artist

and the spectator to the work of art. In the body of the poem this relationship is generalized to include perception through the metaphor which the landscape provides. The landscape has two contrasting aspects. But in "Kubla Khan" the contrast between the Khan's architectural and landscaping gestures in lines 1-11 and the natural, wild, and unencompassed scene of the "deep romantic chasm," its fountain, and so forth, in lines 12-30, suggests the distinction between the secondary activities of art and culture, which use the materials of nature to create new materials, and the primary activities of perception. The Khan, like the artist, builds out of nature. But the labours of the earth, her flingings of huge *fragments* into air, and her forcing up of the fountain as the source of the river, are analogues of the unconscious mind creating its nature for itself.

An alternative allegory to account for the contrast in landscape presents itself, however, as the distinction between fancy and imagination. Coleridge had not yet articulated either the fancy/imagination distinction or the distinction between primary and secondary imagination. They can only be said to be implicit in the poem, a fact which suggests how much his experiences as a poet must have affected his thinking about art, reality, and the faculties of mind or "powers of knowledge."²⁸ The Khan's measuring and counting, his erecting of walls, and his decrees suggest a more mechanical construction relying on fancy as its faculty of direction. As a contrast, the natural imagery of stanza II combines both the idea of the truly artistic mode of construction according to organic principles, and the idea that art mirrors nature as an organically unified and naturally produced whole. It also suggests the metaphorical implications of the idea of fragment: not only artifacts, but natural objects are fragments in the sense that they participate in a greater whole: "dancing rocks" is an effective image to combine the two oppositions of culture and nature, and the idea that every part may be both a unity and a fragment of a larger unity. "Dancing rocks" may relate to "stony reason" as well, and may imply a theory of language and art as inevitably degenerating through familiarity (as will be further discussed below). Shelley's "dead metaphors," or Coleridge's "worn-out metaphors," would seem to express a similar idea. The image of the earth labouring in "fast thick pants" suggests childbirth, the birth of ideas or works of art, and natural production as all interrelated experiences contrasted with more deliberate, mechanical productions.²⁹

The overlapping of these two allegories in the landscape imagery suggests no accidental ambiguity. It suggests that the activity of secondary imagination has a further, ominous aspect to it. It can degenerate from the creation of new metaphors and symbols into a faculty manipulating fixities and determinates, or it can be mistaken for such a faculty. Shelley expressed this sinister aspect when he pointed to the degeneration of metaphors into dead metaphors;³⁰ Coleridge pointed to truths so true as to lose the power of

truth.³¹ Thus the ambivalence of the landscape actually seems to function to express this further side of imaginative experience and its gradual change into fancy, and indeed memory. Perception even more than art seems to suffer the degeneration which results in a chasm between thought and thing. Indeed, art is the corrective to the degenerate perceptions of "single vision". The only corrective to degenerate art is art that revitalizes the lost associations. The representation of the cessation of imagination or its change into fancy and memory is a repetition of the preface and epilogue; both bemoan the loss of vision in a much more explicit way, though perhaps less demonstrably, since here we actually have an instance of the difference: the Khan measures and decrees and walls and girdles. He shuts out nature and imagination, and art degenerates.³²

The preface encourages such a procedure of internalizing the landscape, or making it a topographical metaphor of mental processes.³³ The stream of consciousness of the preface both in the extended metaphor of images on a stream and the lines from "A Picture" provides a model for interpretation of the landscape. The use of landscape as the content to be internalized suggests two applications: first, the landscape we know as nature is revealed as an externalized projection of mind, and secondly the topographical imagery acting as the surface or landscape of the *poem* is equally projected. To understand either nature or art correctly, we must understand them as things, but as things not absolutely external and independent of perception. For as the poem has suggested in preface, epilogue, and body, and in several allegoric levels of all, things originate in the life of the mind and are projected according to its principles and categories of organization. The "prejudice of outness" almost obliterates this awareness of the origins of things: art can remind us of it, and give us a truer view of experience: what is "given" and "external" seems so because its production originates at unconscious levels.

The poem depicts the tremendous desire of the human psyche to create objects and send them out into the world. And it shows nature in the throes of the same intense productivity. The Khan, the damsel, the visionary, and the poet are all making, and nature is making rivers, fountains, and fragments of "dancing rocks." But at the same time as the poem expresses the force and primacy of this making instinct, it also seeks to understand its origins, its conditions for success, its degeneration, and its recurrence. It seeks to analyse the relation of the product made to the maker, and to the experience that inspired the maker.³⁴ It shows how the familiar devices of personification of forces (e.g., the Abyssinian maid as imagination and the "person on business from Porlock" as ego - two figures additionally effective in their contrast with each other), and the creation of personas either to split the self of the author or to make a caricature of the "sleeping" reader, are instances of "thingifying." But by demonstrating the process of

making, things are "dethingified": their origins are shown to be in the creating mind, not in an external substance.

The myths of dream and vision, and the invitation to internalize the landscape as a psychological topography, further act to depict the art of thingifying and the tenuousness of the border between art and reality, mind and nature, creation and perception. The writer makes distinctions between dream and reality, creates distinct characters in the vision, distinct parts to the poem, distinct landscapes, distinct objects, but then builds an uncertainty around them all so that closer examination reveals them to be striving toward a dissolution of distinct selves or boundaries. For example, the maid's song and Kubla's dome are distinct, but are then mysteriously brought together both when we realize that the "second" vision may imply that the song of the maid is about the dome, and when the visionary says that he will build the dome with the song of the maid. The visionary and the damsel are not altogether distinct, as we realize she occurred in a vision; and even Kubla and the visionary are identified in the visionary's claim that he will build the dome in air: he takes over Kubla's distinct role.³⁵

Nor can we be certain in the landscape and architectural imagery what is built and what is there already as nature, what is part of the enclosure and what is excluded from it. Are we given a description of what was enclosed or of that which does the enclosing?³⁶ The "forests ancient as the hills" enfold "sunny spots of greenery" but do the walls enclose all, or are they enclosed by the forests? Is the deep romantic chasm within or without the walls? Is it part of or an alternative to the Khan's gardens, and has he surrounded it or walled it out?

The landscape models, and thus enriches, the indeterminacy of the poem's boundaries. Does the epilogue contain the body of the poem as an embedded vision, or is it contained in the Khan's landscape vision? The ambivalence is effectively expressed by the detail of contrasting "here" in line 10 with "there" in line 8. Moreover, the narrator's perspective is subtly indicated as "here," in the ancient forests, as opposed to "there," in the gardens (the 1828 and 1829 editions ignore the distinction; "here" is repeated in line 8). The narrator seems to be located in the natural scenery looking down upon the artifice of the Khan. He might be understood to be singing of the dangers and limitations of uninspired art: of imposing form instead of discovering it. Or he may be emphasizing the important relation of nature to art, thus suggesting the integration of inspiration and intention: art must be produced naturally, but with skill or artifice. This is precisely the dilemma suggested by both the preface and the visionary of the epilogue. In the preface, "the Author" is tempted apparently to try to fashion what he cannot regain from the muse: "Yet from the still surviving recollections in his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him... Σοφιστον [Λυριον]

ἄδιον ἄσω [tomorrow I will sing a song]: but the to-morrow is yet to come." This is at least the view of the persona, but perhaps "the Author" is too wise to attempt such an artificial work. Likewise, the visionary knows that his "vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision" of the damsel is not enough to build the dome in air (the rest of the poem?); only a revival, not a memory, but a genuine imaginative reproduction of the lost vision, will achieve the completion desired: a genuine repetition.

The most extraordinary ambivalence occurs in the last part of the body of the poem, lines 31-6, in which the shadow of the dome of pleasure seems to be the referent of "it" in line 35, rather than the dome itself. And both lines 36 and 46 suggest that the miracle is not the dome of pleasure, but a unification of the dome and the caves of ice. But the caves of ice are nature's child; only the dome is Kubla's creation. We tend to forget this distinction and read the lines as if the Khan had created this synthesized miracle "That sunny dome! those caves of ice!" But it seems to arise from the musings of the narrator about the shadow of the dome floating upon the waves midway between fountain and caves.

Lines 31-6 suggest further clues to the perspective of the narrator of the body of the poem as an observer seeking to portray the limitations of "decreed" art. The ambiguous reference of "it" in line 35 to either "the shadow of the dome" or "sunny dome with caves of ice" has Platonic undertones of relations of shadow to substance with the correspondent reversal of the reality of each. The "miracle of rare device" referring either to shadow or to the fusion of dome and caves is something more than the mere dome of the Khan it would seem, and the narrator, by introducing these lines, strangely disconnected from the landscape of lines 1-30, seems to be trying to propose some solution to the opposition between art and nature. The use of the word "measure" to mean song or music contrasts with the literal measurements of the Khan for his garden, and sets up a tension since the source of this "mingled measure" is the "caverns measureless to man," and the fountain. The implication might be that imagination most faithfully captures the nature of human experience not by measuring it deductively or quantitatively; it measures by expressing that nature in outward forms but according to inner principles, and thereby best captures its "dimensions."

Concluding Remarks

A model of ambivalence occurs in the epilogue and is mirrored in the preface. The reported speech of lines 49-54 is attributed to an unidentified group of observers, the "all." But the speech is not direct report, it is the interpolation of the visionary: the words are his, the symbols and images are

his representations (as the damsel's song was his also). And although this audience at first appears hostile, it is not really clear whether they are ostracizing the poet or worshipping him, and it is far from clear which attitude the visionary is describing. For the revived music heard by the "all" also will enable them to see the dome and caves of ice.

The persona created in the preface suffers the same reversal. His perspective seems limited and narrow, as he brands the poem fragmentary and a "psychological curiosity." He believes the author intends to finish the poem, but is unable to. Indeed there is no limit to the interpolation from the manuscript note that we may ascribe to him. The extraordinary intrusion of an "I" in the last sentence of the preface seems to give further reality to the persona of the preface writer as a mere editor of the poems, and not the author of them. Whatever the author may have told him may have been meant ironically, and he may have taken it all literally. But even this naivety is transcended when one realizes that the persona, as long as he is not distinguished from Coleridge, is the literal-minded reader projecting his own notions of fragment (as literally a fragment) and psychological curiosity (as hence not of poetic merit) on to Coleridge. He assumes Coleridge means the preface literally because the reader cannot see it imaginatively. But the moment he "thingifies" a persona, sees the possibility of indirectness and irony, and takes the hint from the third person narrative and the conflicting "I" in the last line ("I have annexed a fragment of a very different character"), he has actually "thingified" or made an object of awareness his own unimaginative response to the poem, distanced himself from it, and thereby overcome it. He too, then, must personify, as does the artist, his "person on business from Porlock," who restricts his view.

The process comes full circle as the reader realizes now the importance of personification as a model, and the importance of the symbolic and mythic meanings of the dream, the fragment, and so forth. For as he does, he sees that there is no longer a need to maintain the preface persona, with Coleridge as the ironical detached creator of him. The very terms of the preface: the "dream," the "fragment," and the "psychological curiosity," all were meant symbolically anyway. They are not pejorative terms but simply characterizations which identify the nature of all aesthetic products. That is, all poems are fragments, in the sense that they are "portions of one great poem"; all originate in dream-like states or "sleeps of the external senses"; and all are psychological curiosities because all are expressive of the mind's mode of perception by "thingifying" experience into outward forms. Thus Coleridge achieves an aesthetic representation of his philosophy of art: he is not content with mere discursive rendering. He embodies his theory in the practice, and this may partially account for the richness of his poem.

Thus, just as the apparent irreverence of the speakers in lines 49-54 is changed to worship, so the criticisms and belittling comments of the preface

are changed into descriptions of what art should be. The persona is dropped when we read the preface as written by Coleridge the genius, who had confidence in his poetry and had the ability to devise every conceivable mode of helping the reader to see its richness, including the risk of making himself a "laughing-stock" in order to make available to the reader the tool of irony and indirectness if metaphor and symbol proved too difficult in the first stages. To sacrifice his right of authorship to the muse and the poem's claim to meaning by originating it in a dream, in order that the reader may be stimulated to a kind of authorship by interpreting the dream, is a gesture of incalculable generosity.³⁷

The myriad ambiguities and possibilities discussed throughout this chapter result from the effort to represent the complex, contradictory and multivalent nature of both aesthetic and perceptual experience from several different perspectives. Thus the visionary "I" of the epilogue may be seen as a model reader, striving to respond appropriately to the work of art, the Khan's productions, by means of the damsel, a personification of imagination or inspiration. In this respect the structure of "Kubla Khan" is much like that of "The Ancient Mariner," the Wedding Guest serving a similar function as a model spectator. But the visionary "I" is then complicated by representing, as well as the reader's or spectator's perspective, the act of composition from the poet's point of view. Indeed he has usually been understood only in this way, as ideal poet, though it is arguable that his spectator function is still more interesting and adds a dimension to the poem, for his role as poet is only a repetition of the Khan's representation as a poet. This dual role of the visionary "I" helps to emphasize the essential similarity of the poet's and the reader's roles.

Further complications arise in an effort to grasp the significance of the Khan's activities. For he has been seen to offer an equally contradictory duality like the visionary "I." The Khan's paradoxical nature is slightly different: he offers a split in the artist's nature, rather than a split between artist and spectator. He represents the artist as too purposeful, as conscious, and as uninspired, that is, as talent and artifice, in distinction from genius. And he represents the true artist and his essential integration with nature and natural forces, the word nature drawing on all its other connotations as well, of human nature, the natural, and nature as imagination. The ambivalent relation of the garden to the natural scenery contributes to this paradoxical duality. But this duality further represents the way even true art can become degenerate, through familiarity, habit, and acquiescent approbation, or, for example, unthinking acceptance of certain works as of classic stature. This possibility immediately creates another split, analogous to the split in the artist's nature. That is, the reader is subject to such a split, and he too can be represented as inspired or only artificially responsive. This ambivalence in readership is iterated in the portrayal of the

"all who cry," where it is not clear whether the attitude is worshipful or censorious.

But the reader split seems most effectually represented in the preface, and in this, "Kubla Khan" once again repeats the technique of "The Ancient Mariner," with its gloss persona. For the preface persona seems to offer the identity of a reductive and naive reader who fails to see the importance of the artifact as self-imagining. The "person on business from Porlock" may be, like the damsel, a personification of a faculty of the mind, but in this case the faculty personified is not the one instrumental in creative response. That faculty represses and censors, and therefore properly belongs to the reductive reader persona as his habitual state; it belongs to the poet only as an interruptive agent. The complication in the preface persona, not repeated in the gloss persona in "The Ancient Mariner," involves another level of self-awareness; the preface persona as a reductive reader turns out to be a projection caused by the failure of the reader to take the elements of the dream, the fragment, and "psychological curiosity" as metaphors. If taken as metaphors, these elements imply a persona who is not a reductive reader, but who is ironizing that sort of reader.

One final set of complexities must be considered, involving the relation of the epilogue to the body of the poem, and the preface to the verse. It has been pointed out at length that the relation of the last eighteen lines to the first thirty-six is problematic in the extreme. This uncertainty could be taken to represent the obscure relation of the reader to his text and the poet to his creation. The omniscience of the narrator of the first thirty-six lines implies that there is no question of conscious control or volition in this relation. And the contrast of omniscience with first person narrative in the epilogue seems to highlight this difference between conscious and unconscious selves or states. This last section of the verse, like the final stanza of "The Eolian Harp" and the last stanza of "This Lime-Tree Bower," and like the Wedding Guest framework in "The Ancient Mariner" or the ambivalence of the imagery of frost in "Frost at Midnight" in the last stanza of that poem, adds a level of self-consciousness to the poem and without this level the verse would be incomplete, ending at an arbitrary point. An experience would have been portrayed, but without any level of reflection about that experience, and without any reflection about the possibility and nature of communicating it. It would have remained at a remove, as an external object never assimilated, never "seeking echo or mirror of itself," never "making a Toy of Thought." Without such a level of reflection, the poem would have been a literal fragment; but with its epilogue, like all the poems mentioned above, it becomes a complete, rich work of art.

The preface acts as a link between the reader and the poem and as such its relation to the verse is as problematic as is the relation of art to reality or of spectator to art. It is appropriately ironic, as is the gloss, because it

thereby renders the inherent irony of the spectator's situation. It gently caricatures the delusion of literal-mindedness, and gives metaphor as the solution to that imprisoning language. And since it engages the reader aesthetically and not discursively, it is proper to consider it as an integral part of the text, not merely as an external prose commentary, though of course it seems to be only that to the unimaginative, reductive reader parodied in the persona. Perhaps it would be correct to conclude that such a negative model of reading as is offered by the preface and the gloss of "The Ancient Mariner" must always appear to be outside the formal structure of a work of art initially. For its function can only be apprehended after a level of critical reflection on the work has been achieved. A positive model, on the other hand, such as the visionary or Wedding Guest, or the speaker in other poems such as "This Lime-Tree Bower," can always be understood as the poet. This viewing of someone else's experience does not require self-conscious reflection, but it should never be mistaken for aesthetic response. As most artists realize, superficial non-integration may be a great stimulus to reflection, enabling the reader to discover the profound unity of a work: it can act as a stepping stone to an understanding of the full implications of the more integrated aspects. Thus the preface helps to lead the reader to see the possibilities of the epilogue and its relation to the body of the poem. The apparent non-integration of the epilogue to the body of the poem reflects the schism in experience between the conscious and the unconscious, or the conscious and the self-conscious. The poem will appear as fragmented and incomplete as the understanding of its readership is; but its beauty, that is, its intuited unity and truth to aesthetic experience, has preserved it as a compelling enigma, and will surely continue to do so.

NOTES

- 1 The composition of the verse and the preface of the poem are thought to have been separated by perhaps as much as nineteen years; the dating of the preface is even more difficult than that of the poem, for the poem was certainly written between 1797 and 1799. The preface was probably composed only just before the 1816 publication with "Christabel" and "Pains of Sleep." On the dating of the poem dozens of articles have been written; but of especial interest is Chambers (1933) and (1935). Elizabeth Schneider (1953) 153-237 is surely mistaken in dating "Kubla Khan" as late as she does; Margoliouth (1953) 352-4 indicates a more plausible date of about 1 June 1798. However, October 1797 seems the most likely date for a number of reasons, not to mention Coleridge's own comments on two separate occasions; see Griggs i. 349-52 for a number of comments which encourage acceptance of autumn 1797 as the date of composition. While the apparent gap in years between the composition of verse and preface may seem an argument against the close interaction of the

- two, not only the nature of the interaction, which does not depend upon a proximity in time of composition, but also the existence of the *Crewe Manuscript* with its preface version, which grew into the published version, would militate against such an argument.
- 2 In few of the well-known studies of "Kubla Khan" is the preface discussed as of literary significance, nor is its aesthetic relation to the poem considered. Shaffer (1975) sees the importance of the preface as an expression of a theory of inspiration, but discusses it more in relation to higher criticism of the Bible in Germany in the 1790s. Chayes (1966) offers a brief but suggestive account. Coleridge's contemporaries differed in their responses to the meaning of the preface. Peacock insisted the preface should be received with a "certain degree of scepticism" (Peacock (1924-34) viii. 290). Alford recorded a similarly sceptical comment by Wordsworth (Alford (1873) 62).
 - 3 The stanzaic structure of the poem differs from edition to edition. The *Crewe Manuscript* has only one major division, occurring between lines 36 and 37; 1829 has three stanzas, with no new stanza after line 36; 1834 is ambiguous, line 36 coming at the bottom of the page may suggest a fourth stanza. Even with these variations in mind, the reader usually senses major division between the first 36 and the last 18 lines.
 - 4 Fogle (1960) argues for the unity of the poem as advancing through a reconciliation of opposites to a unified whole. See also Rauber (1964) 212-21. Meyerstein (1937) discusses the unity of the poem and its genre as a short Pindaric ode, with two main divisions only.
 - 5 According to Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron was "highly struck" with Coleridge's recitation of the poem in 1816 (Leigh Hunt (1928) 345).
 - 6 Coleridge had presented his work under other auspices before, such as Nehemiah Higginbottom (author of a series of sonnets in the *Monthly Magazine*, November 1797), as he pointedly explained in the *Biographia* (see Shawcross i. 17-19, on this and other (anonymous) contributions). Elizabeth Schneider suggests that Coleridge may have been the author of two articles attributed to a "Professor Heeren of Göttingen" appearing in the *Monthly Magazine* of January 1800, a gesture of irony if it were truly Coleridge's work. Is "Heeren" possibly a play on "Herr" and on the German practice of piling up titles before a name? See Elizabeth Schneider (1953) 289 ff.
- Kierkegaard is the most obvious related example of an author creating personas for the sake of ironic communication. Shelley often attached prefaces in the form of advertisements to his poems, sometimes echoing the preface to "Kubla Khan" in tone and style, and in the creation of a persona. See e.g., the advertisement to "Epipsychidion."
- 7 This note is attached to the *Crewe Manuscript*, now in the British Library, dated 1810 according to Watson (1966) 119. See John Beer's edition of *Coleridge Poems* in the Everyman paperback (1963) 164, for a discussion of the *Crewe Manuscript*.
 - 8 The explanation usually advanced for why Coleridge wrote the preface suggests that the preface was a gesture of self-defence for not having finished the poem. See e.g., Yarlott (1967) 128 for a fairly representative account: "[the preface was written in] self-defence, anticipating the charge of obscurity which the

- poem's acknowledged imperfection of organization would produce..." "Acknowledged" by T. S. Eliot perhaps, but see footnote 10. See also Lowes, who, it would seem, had promulgated this basic position some forty years earlier, in *The Road to Xanadu* (1927), chs 18, 19, 20, and esp. 412-13. Elizabeth Schneider (1953) 26 ff. expresses a similar assessment.
- 9 Lowes (1927) 358 reminds us that "in ancient tradition the stately pleasure-dome of Kubla Khan itself came into being, like the poem, as the embodiment of a remembered vision in a dream." Lowes thinks this point insignificant enough to be relegated entirely to a footnote. But this is just the sort of point Coleridge would have seen fit to turn to his own use by creating a poem designed in a dream as an analogue of the Khan's palace or dome, an analogue expressly designed to draw the reader's attention away from the obvious content of the poem and toward the composition and reading of the poem. J. P. Collier's report suggests that Coleridge was aware of the legend that the Khan's plan for a palace had originated in a dream (Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism* (1930) ii. 47). Coleridge's own comments elsewhere suggest a thorough awareness of the pregnancy of the dream as a metaphor for poetic composition. A marginal note to Eichorn (1787) iii. 38 is pertinent to the preface:

From the analogy of Dreams during an excited state of the Nerves, which I have myself experienced, and the wonderful intricacy, complexity, and yet clarity of the visual Objects, I should infer the [spontaneity and inspired character of Ezekiel's vision of God]. Likewise, 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, weighs greatly with me, against the hypothesis of Pre-meditation, in this and similar Passages of the Prophetic Books.

- And see e.g. Coburn iii. 4410: "We are nigh to waking when we dream, we dream." (Cf. Freud who interprets the dream within a dream as closest to reality.) The visionary in the epilogue may be in some such situation. Note in connection with this the statement in Coleridge, *Literary Remains* (1836-9), i. 173: "A poem may in one sense be a dream, but it must be a waking dream." That "one sense" is perhaps best indicated by another comment, in Coleridge, *Miscellaneous Criticism* (1936) 36: "You will take especial note of the marvellous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space or time in the Faery Queen. . . . It is truly . . . of mental space. The poet has placed you in a dream, a charmed sleep, and you neither wish, nor have the power, to inquire where you are, or how you got there." This freedom from the conscious dictates of space and time characterizing the unconscious and art is mentioned also by A. R. Jones quoting House in "The Conversation and other Poems," Brett (1971) 99: "We are also conscious of an 'extraordinary sense of the mind's very being, in suspense, above time and space,' that 'arises in the poet himself in the act of composition.'"
- 10 Critics from Schneider to Watson have discounted the notion that the poem was literally composed in a dream. See Watson (1966) 120, and Schneider

- (1953) 22 ff and 45. Yarlott and Lowes seem to assume the dream account to be meant literally only, without any symbolic or ironic significance; see Yarlott (1967) 128 and Lowes (1927), chs 18, 19 and 20. Beer points out that however the poem was composed, it is not a "meaningless reverie [as many have assumed] but a poem so packed with meaning as to render detailed elucidation extremely difficult" (Beer (1959) 202). Eliot's view that the poem lacks the organization needed to complement the inspiration is set to rest by the elucidation of the connections amongst the imagery in Beer (1959), chs 7 and 8; see Eliot (1933) 146.
- 11 An anonymous contributor to the *TLS* (16 February 1962) says that this omission from the *Crewe Manuscript* "places the whole matter of the circumstances in which 'Kubla Khan' came into existence in a different, more sober light"; see also Coburn i. 278 on a Mr Porson.
 - 12 Lowes briefly notes this point, but does not seem to attach any importance to it. He, moreover, seems to identify the "I" of the epilogue with a tartar youth (Lowes (1927) 408). Schneider recognizes the contrast between the body and epilogue of the poem, but only concludes from that that the poem is an unfinished fragment! (Schneider (1953) 247-8). Watson interprets the break as a distinction between fancy and imagination (Watson (1966) 124-6). Lowes correctly, I believe, divides the poem up into four sections, in the stanzaic divisions of 1816, but makes no claim that the fourth is different from the other three (Lowes (1927) 406). In Yarlott (1967) 147 ff, no distinctions between the parts are drawn at all in any conscious sense, nor is there any significant discussion of how the epilogue content relates to the lines 1-36, or why it varies in narrative perspective, content, and style.
 - 13 The title of the work is actually *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, though Coleridge's version sometimes appears on the bindings of editions and, as E. H. Coleridge has pointed out in his notes, the lines which Coleridge quotes as his source are quite different from the lines in the *Pilgrimage*.
 - 14 Lowes (1927) 362 ff. suggests that a passage in *Purchas* does at least mention damsels and youths and songs. "Abyssinian" and "dulcimer" are traceable to more obscure sources, though Abyssinian is discussed later by Purchas. The damsels and youths were inmates of the Khan's palace, however, a point which serves to connect the singing damsel even more closely with the Khan's activities.
 - 15 Many critics since have disagreed with Lowes's reductive assumption that the "I" of lines 37-54 is a tartar youth. Most postulate him as the archetypal poet, and cite sources as ancient as Plato's *Ion* to mark the connection between poetry, madness, and the corresponding imagery of honey-dew and milk, and the flashing eyes and floating hair. See, e.g., Yarlott (1967) 148 ff., who too simply equates the "I" with Coleridge and not the poet *par excellence* as well. Watson (1966) 122 sees him as the latter, as does Schneider (1945) 800. Beer offers the most satisfactory account of the "I" as visionary, artist, or genius: "the apotheosis of all the 'divine men' who had haunted Coleridge's youthful imagination" (Beer (1959) 261 ff.). He is not Coleridge, but Coleridge's ideal of absolute genius (as contrasted with commanding genius); not Coleridge himself but only Coleridge as he transcended himself:

To have a genius is to live in the universal, to know no self but that which is reflected not only from the faces of all around us, our fellow creatures, but reflected from the flowers, the trees, the beasts, yea from the very surface of the sands of the desert. A man of genius finds a reflex to himself, were it only in the mystery of genius (*P. Lects.* 179).

- 16 That the damsel sings of "Mount Abora" seems to exclude her from being the singer of lines 1-36. But in nearly all of the important passages traced as sources for the River Alph, a mountain was present, from which the river sprang. Thus the river and the mountain are always closely associated in the landscape, so that to sing of Mount Abora would be to sing of the river as well. For the most important mountain - river connection see Beer (1959) 221: "This river, as soon as it issues out from between the cleft of the mountain..." See also 220, for another connection: "... the River Barrady breaks out from between the Mountains: its Gardens extending almost to the very place," and 257 for the religious and inspirational associations of the mountain. Lowes (1927) 361 offers other sources in which the river issues from a mountain. See especially 372 for a description of a mountain full of water that is forced out at the foot to become the river. Still more importantly for the connection, Lowes 373 traces the name Abora not to a mountain but to the names of two rivers, Abola and Astaboras. Lowes concludes, "... Mount Amara - its name merged with the name of the river that flowed by the Mountains of the Moon" (376). See further 382. And see the *Crewe Manuscript* for the variant "Mt Amara."
- Beer further associates the maid with the Khan's world by uncovering the explicit sexual and female connotations of the walls and towers and gardens, and their sources in the *Song of Solomon* (see Beer (1959) 270-1). Thus not only might the maid's song be construed as the song of lines 1-36, but the landscape description would be of the "damsel with a dulcimer" described allegorically.
- 17 Thus the pun on "air" as melody. Cf. "The Eolian Harp" line 32. For Coleridge on music as "articulated breath" see Coburn iii. 4022.
- 18 See e.g., *Lay Sermons* 29 for Coleridge on the imagination as that "reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, ... gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors." Note the use of "harmonious." Note also the explanation in *Shawcross* i. 86. All efforts to identify the Abyssinian maid with a specific woman in Coleridge's life seem reductive and quite contrary to the activity of imagination as a producer of symbols, not of allegories (see *Lay Sermons* 30).
- 19 See Coleridge "On the Philosophic Import of the Words Object and Subject," (1821) 247-50, on the given and the external.
- 20 Jean Paul Richter (1804) places the idea of the poet's observation, his "Schau" or "Betrachtung," of his own work of art, at the centre of the theory of irony as aesthetic distance, since the artist is said to be simultaneously spectator, and vice versa. The artist's ability to maintain a third person perspective *while creating*, is a measure of his achievement of ironic self-consciousness.

- 21 Watson (1966) 120 says "Kubla Khan" is "wonderfully of a piece." Beer (1959) 275 also argues with detailed analysis for the completeness of the poem. On the poem's metrical unity, see Purves (1962).
- 22 A further reason for thinking that Coleridge's description of the dream and the "images [which] rose up before him as *things*" was a metaphor of poetic composition, is to be found in his letters to Southey and Davy, and Godwin as well, which Lowes (1927) 66, points to as descriptions of eidetic imagery. Coleridge seems to have been unusually adept at this ability to seem actually to see scenes before one as external, independent perceptions, at the same time that one is aware that they are purely mental productions. But see also the Eichorn marginal note quoted above, note 9.
- 23 See, e.g., the anecdote about reading Plato in Shawcross i. 160-1, or the letter from a friend in chapter 13. Both chapters are full of recipes for reading imaginatively. The gloss to "The Ancient Mariner," it will be argued below, is a fine instance of a parodied reading situation.
- 24 Yeats writes about the paradoxical relation of active and passive in creative experience:

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols (Yeats (1964) 48).

- Yet Yeats never underestimated the conscious role of the poet. See Beer (1959) 203-4 for Yeats's appreciation of the balance between instinct and intention.
- 25 Coleridge describes this peculiar passive, receptive state of the conscious mind in Shawcross i. 166-7, in his quotation from Plotinus, and in his metaphor of the air-sylph or the chrysalis.
- 26 For Coleridge's use of "thingify," see Griggs iv. 885 to Derwent Coleridge, November 1818: "... to think is to thingify." The entire passage on logic is relevant.
- 27 See Shelley, "The Defence of Poetry":

Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry". . . for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure [(Percy Bysshe Shelley (1951) 517)].

Shelley then goes on to make observations expressly relevant to the loss of vision of the visionary, and relevant to Coleridge: "Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the

- decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet." Shelley further notes a point lending support to the hypothesis that Coleridge's dream account is a metaphorical rendering of the poetic process of composition: "I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connexion of the spaces between their suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself." And see the important passage on judgement and instinct in Griggs iv. 898n (to Tulk, 17 December 1818). See also Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism* (1930) i. 197-8, and Shawcross ii. 258, "On Poesy or Art." And see *Coleridge's Literary Criticism* (1921) 186.
- 28 See Walter Jackson Bate and John Bullitt (1945) for sources which could well have influenced Coleridge's early thinking.
- 29 Most critics see the Khan's activities as unrepresentative of artistic creation, because he seems to decree, measure, and quantify. See Beer's analysis in terms of the commanding genius distinguished from the absolute genius (Beer (1959) 216-17 and 226-7). Watson (1966) 122 agrees that the poem has levels concerned with aesthetic process, but his claim that the first 36 lines of the poem are results merely of the faculty of fancy is inconsistent with the richness of the images and their power as symbols invoking universals. He seems to make the poem into a mere allegory.
- 30 See Percy Bysshe Shelley (1951) 496. For Coleridge on the degeneration of truth see the appropriate passage in Coburn i. 119 dated only vaguely as 1795-6: "Truth is compared in scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in perpetual progression, they stagnate into a muddy pool of conformity & tradition. Milton." The Khan at least showed wisdom in building his dome by a streaming fountain of truth.
- 31 See further *Aids*, aphorism I, and *Friend* i. 110.
- 32 See Yarlott (1967) 133 on the Khan shutting out nature. And see also 131 ff. for a general discussion of the Khan's "art" as opposed to truly inspired art. Yarlott (1967) 151 makes an interesting comparison of Kubla's garden with the dell, marriage, and domesticity generally. See Beer (1959) 222-3 for similar observations, and his additional insight that the Khan's garden of earthly paradise and the sun-worship of the poem suggest the pantheistic tendencies which always conflicted with Christianity in Coleridge's thought.
- 33 The landscape of "Kubla Khan" seems to reflect late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century interests in gardening as a metaphor for the cultivation of genius. Shaftesbury, and earlier, Sir William Temple, had all written using the garden as a metaphor for genius. The metaphor became more interesting as writers set up the dichotomy between the carefully landscaped garden (geometric garden), the "Chinese" garden (less obviously manicured), and the wild, natural garden. Finally the garden was contrasted with nature itself, and this contrast reflected the changing attitude toward the nature of genius and the relation of instinct to judgement. The poetry of the eighteenth century also

reflected the development of the concept of genius in the imagery, Thomson, and later Chatterton, amongst others, relying more and more upon natural scenery, which culminated in the romantic landscapes of the Gothic novels and romantic poetry.

- 34 The poem also suggests to many critics a level of creation at the cosmico-religious level; thus Shaffer's relating of "Kubla Khan" to higher Biblical criticism (Shaffer (1975)), and Mercer's relating the poem to Jacob Boehme and the redemptive process, Mercer (1953). The connection of the poem with *Paradise Lost*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Ezekiel* enriches the religious dimension. For a different, more pagan, interpretation, see Charles I. Patterson (1974).
- 35 Thus the visionary is distinct from the Khan only in that he possesses the Abyssinian maid – he is artist inspired, while the Khan is perhaps artist, or maker, without inspiration, at least from the visionary's point of view. It is the Khan's dome and garden which are "unfinished" for the spectator: they lack the completing inspiration of imagination. Boundaries seem arbitrary and not expressive of any integral part/whole relationship or of any interaction with nature and with the materials out of which the boundaries are built. It is true, as most critics maintain (Yarlott (1967) 145–6; Beer (1959) 246, but see Watson (1966) 123 and 128 for a contrasting view), that the visionary's "dome in air," the "shadow dome" and the Khan's "pleasure dome" are all different. But they are different only as maid, visionary, and Khan are different: as aspects of the self and, as Blake would put it, as different levels of vision. Or they illustrate the changing function of imagery, from description of an external landscape, to symbolic of the internal organizing mind. It is necessary to stress however that the Khan's activities, his gardens, may also be a model of imaginative, vital art, as well as of degenerate art. This apparently contradictory two-fold significance best expresses the nature of art and metaphor as potentially degenerative from the point of view of spectator and artist. Thus visionary and Khan may have identical roles as artists, or they may be seen as opposite – the Khan as artist, the visionary as spectator wishing to complete for himself by imaginative response the unfinished dome. Thus the poem represents vividly the aesthetic situation of spectator striving to recreate for himself the work of art – the dome – by means of imagination – the damsel.
- 36 Watson (1966) 123 recognizes the ambiguity of the contained or containing imagery and landscape. Yarlott assumes reductively that the ancient forests are encompassed by the Khan's walls, but not assimilated into the garden effectively. A recognition by Yarlott of the enclosure ambiguity would, however, strengthen his case that art which shuts out or fails to assimilate nature is only artifice; see Yarlott (1967) 137.
- 37 Contemporary reviewers of "Kubla Khan" did not see it this way. *The Eclectic Review* 5 (1816) 565–72 announced that the poem should never have been published. Hazlitt said it was "nonsense" in the *Examiner* (2 June 1816) 348–9. The most favourable response was to estimate the poem as "not wholly discreditable," as "Christabel" was said to be, *Anti-Jacobin Review* 50 (1816) 632–6. More recently, Eliot felt called upon to protest against "the exaggerated repute of *Kubla Khan*" (Eliot (1933) 146).

"Christabel": The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form

KAREN SWANN

The first questions Christabel asks Geraldine refer to identity and origins: "who art thou?" and "how camest thou here?" Geraldine's response is oblique; in effect she replies, "I am like you, and my story is like your own":

My sire is of a noble line,
And my name is Geraldine:
Five warriors seized me yesternorn,
Me, even me, a maid forlorn: . . .

They spurred amain, their steeds were white:
And once we crossed the shade of night.
As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,
I have no thought what men they be;
Nor do I know how long it is
(For I have lain entranced I wis)
Since one, the tallest of the five,
Took me from the palfrey's back,
A weary woman, scarce alive. . . .

Whither they went I cannot tell –
I thought I heard, some minutes past,
Sounds as of a castle bell.
Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she),
And help a wretched maid to flee.

Geraldine's tale echoes and anticipates Christabel's. Christabel is also first introduced as the daughter of a "noble" father; she, too, experiences things she "cannot tell," calls on Heaven to rescue her, crosses thresholds and falls into trances. But in contrast to the story "Christabel," often criticized for its ambiguities, Geraldine's tale presents sexual and moral categories as unambiguous and distinct: villainous male force appropriates and silences an innocent female victim. This difference effects a corresponding clarification of genre. Geraldine translates "Christabel" into the familiar terms of the tale of terror.

Geraldine's translation would appear to establish the identity of the woman. Ultimately, however, her story complicates the issue of feminine identity by suggesting its entanglement, at the origin, with genre. How one takes Geraldine depends on one's sense of the "line" of representations she comes from. For Christabel, but also, for any absorbed reader of circulating library romances, Geraldine's story of abduction works as a seduction — Christabel recognizes Geraldine as a certain type of heroine and embraces her.² More guarded readers appropriate Geraldine as confidently as Christabel does, but they see her quite differently. Charles Tomlinson, for example, reads "Christabel" as "a tale of terror," but in contrast to Geraldine's own story casts her in the role of villain, while for Patricia Adair, Geraldine is betrayed by her very conventionality: she tells her story in "rather unconvincing and second-rate verse which was, no doubt, deliberately meant to sound false."³ Geraldine is "false" because she comes from an ignoble line of Gothic temptresses, or, in the case of other critics, because she can be traced back to the ignoble Duessa and to a host of other predatory figures. Tellingly these sophisticated readers, who employ literary history to read Geraldine as a figure of untruth, are the worst ruffians — they either refuse to hear the woman's story of her own abduction, or assume that her protests are really a come-on.

Geraldine may be Christabel's ghost or projection as many critics have suggested, but only if we acknowledge that Christabel produces herself as a received representation — a feminine character who in turn raises the ghosts of different subtexts, each dictating a reading of her as victim or seductress, good or evil, genuine or affected. I will be arguing in this essay that "Christabel" both dramatizes and provokes hysteria. The poem explores the possessing force of certain bodies — Geraldine's, of course, but also bodies of literary convention, which I am calling "genres." Particularly in Coleridge's day, debates on literary decorum allowed the gendering of structure in a way that seemed to assuage anxiety about the subject's relation to cultural forms. Questions involving the subject's autonomy could be framed as an opposition between authentic, contained "manly" speech and "feminine" bodies — the utterly conventional yet licentiously imaginative female characters, readers, and genres of the circulating libraries. In "Christabel,"

Coleridge both capitalizes on and exposes culture's tactical gendering of formal questions. The poem invites us to link the displacing movement of cultural forms through subjects to the "feminine" malady of hysteria and the "feminine" genres of the circulating library; at the same time, it mockingly and dreamily informs us that hysteria is the condition of all subjects in discourse, and that the attribution of this condition to feminine bodies is a conventional, hysterical response.

I

If Coleridge were thinking of dramatizing hysteria in a poem, he might have turned to Burton's account of "Maids', Nuns', and Widows' Melancholy" in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a book he knew well. According to Burton, hysterics "think themselves bewitched":

Some think they see visions, confer with spirits and devils, they shall surely be damned, are afraid of some treachery, imminent danger, and the like, they will not speak, make answer to any question, but are almost distracted, mad, or stupid for the time, and by fits. . . .⁴

The malady befalls barren or celibate women; among these, Catholic noblewomen who are forced to remain idle are particularly susceptible. Most of the symptoms Burton catalogues are touched on in the passage quoted above. Hysterics have visions and are afraid "by fits" — the "fits of the mother" or womb ("the heart itself beats, is sore grieved, and faints . . . like fits of the mother" (p. 415)). The symptom which most interests Burton, though, is the inability of hysterics to communicate their troubles: they "cannot tell" what ails them. This fact becomes a refrain of his own exposition: "and yet will not, cannot again tell how, where, or what offends them"; "many of them cannot tell how to express themselves in words, or how it holds them, what ails them; you cannot understand them, or well tell what to make of their sayings" (p. 416).

They "cannot tell," and *you* cannot "well tell" what to make of them: the phenomenon of their blocked or incomprehensible speech seems to produce similar effects in the writer. And indeed, Burton's impetuous and fitful prose in many respects resembles the discourse of the hysteric, into whose point of view he regularly tumbles ("Some *think* they see visions," but "they *shall* surely be damned" (my italics). Far from resisting this identification, Burton makes narrative capital from the slippage, as here, when he allows himself to become "carried away" by sympathy for the Christabel-like afflicted:

I do not so much pity them that may otherwise be eased, but those alone that out of a strong temperament, innate constitution, are

violently carried away with this torrent of inward humours, and though very modest of themselves, sober, religious, virtuous, and well given (as many so distressed maids are), yet cannot make resistance . . .

and then, as if shaking off a "fit," comically pauses to reflect on his own indecorous "torrents":

But where am I? Into what subject have I rushed? What have I to do with nuns, maids, virgins, widows? I am a bachelor myself, and lead a monastic life in a college: *nae ego sane ineptus qui haec dixerim*, I confess 'tis an indecorum, and as Pallas, a virgin, blushed when Jupiter by chance spake of love matters in her presence, and turned away her face, *me reprimam*; though my subject necessarily require it, I will say no more. (p. 417)

Protesting all the while his ignorance of women, the "old bachelor" coyly figures himself as a virgin whose body betrays her when desire takes her unawares. He also takes the part of the apparently more knowing and self-controlled Jupiter, but only to suggest that the latter's fatherly indifference is an act. For whether he is an artful or artless seducer, Jupiter himself appears only to rush into speech "by chance" – the "chance," we suspect, of finding himself in such close proximity to his virginal daughter. The woman whose desire is written on her body is like the man who makes love the "matter" of his discourse: both attempt to disguise desire, and become the more seductive when desire is revealed in the context of their attempts to suppress it.

The story of Pallas and Jupiter is placed at a strategic point in Burton's chapter. It punctuates his resolve to check the torrents of his narrative, a resolve immediately and engagingly broken when, more "by chance" than design, he finds he has to say something more ("And yet I must and will say something more"). This time he is prompted by his commiseration with all distressed women to launch an attack on "them that are in fault,"

. . . those tyrannizing pseudo-politicians, superstitious orders, rash vows, hard-hearted parents, guardians, unnatural friends, allies (call them how you will), those careless and stupid overseers . . .

those fathers and parental substitutes (particularly the Church), who "suppress the vigour of youth" and ensure the orderly descent of their estates through the enforced celibacy of their daughters (p. 418). An "old bachelor" who leads a monastic life in a college; whose own discourse, like the discourse of the hysteric, seems to be the product of a strained compromise between lawless impulses and the claims of order; who might himself be said

to be possessed by spirits and the dead language in which they wrote, ends his discussion of "maids', nuns', and widows' melancholy" by championing those who "cannot tell" against the ungenerous legislators of the world.

There are suggestive correspondences between Burton's chapter on hysteria and "Christabel." Christabel is a virtuous Catholic gentlewoman whose lover is away, possibly at the behest of her father, out of whose castle she "steals" at the beginning of the poem. Whether or not he is responsible for blighting love affairs,⁵ Sir Leoline has affinities with both of Burton's father-figures: like the "pseudopoliticians" he is intimately linked with repressive law; like Jupiter, his relation to his daughter is somewhat suspect. Moreover, the poem's descriptions of Christabel's experiences – first with the possibly supernatural Geraldine and later, with a traumatic memory or scene which comes over her by fits and bars her from telling – and its insistent references to a "mother" who at one point threatens to block Geraldine's speech ("Off, wandering mother!" (l. 205)), follow Burton's account of the characteristic symptoms of hysteria. But Coleridge may have appreciated most the comic slippages in Burton's narrative between the slightly hysterical scholar whose business it is to "tell" and the women who are the matter of his discourse. When he came to write "Christabel," Coleridge told the story through narrators who are as enigmatic as the women they tell about – we cannot "well tell" if they are one voice or two. More than any detail of the plot, the participation of these narrators in the "feminine" exchanges they describe, and the poem's playful suggestion that hysteria cannot be restricted to *feminine* bodies, marks the kinship of "Christabel" and Burton's text.

II

Who is Geraldine and where does she come from? Possibly, from Christabel. In the opening of the poem Christabel has gone into the woods to pray for her absent lover after having had uneasy dreams "all yesternight" – "Dreams, that made her moan and leap, / As on her bed she lay in sleep," we are told in the 1816 version of the poem. In the woods *two* ladies perform the actions of moaning and leaping which, yesternight, *one* lady had performed alone:

The lady leaps up suddenly,
The lovely lady, Christabel!
It moaned as near, as near can be,
But what it is she cannot tell –
On the other side it seems to be,
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

(1816: ll. 37–42)

For a moment we, too, are in the woods, particularly if, like the poem's "first" readers, we already know something of the plot. Does "the lady" refer to Christabel or Geraldine? Is her leaping up the cause or effect of flight? The next lines supply answers to these questions, and as the scene proceeds "it" resolves into the distinct, articulate character Geraldine. For a moment's space, however, we entertain the notion that an uneasy lady leaped up suddenly and terrified herself.

Burton says of hysterics, "some think they see visions, confer with spirits and devils, they shall surely be damned." Geraldine is such a "vision." She appears in response to what Burton implies and psychoanalysis declares are the wishes of hysterics — to get around patriarchal law, which legislates desire. In the beginning of the poem Christabel "cannot tell" what ails her, but critics have theorized from her sighs that she is suffering from romance, from frustrated love for the "lover that's far away," for the Baron, or even, for the mother.⁵ Geraldine, who appears as if in answer to Christabel's prayer, "steals" with her back into the castle, sleeps with her "as a mother with her child," and then meets the Baron's embrace, allows the performance of these wishes. Moreover, like an hysterical symptom, which figures both desire and its repression, Geraldine also fulfills the last clause of Burton's formula: although much is ambiguous *before* she appears, it is not until she appears that Christabel feels "damned," and that we are invited to moralize ambiguity as duplicity, the cause of "sorrow and shame" (ll. 270, 296, 674).

As well as answering *Christabel's* desires, however, Geraldine answers the indeterminacy of the narrative and the reader's expectancy. The wood outside the Baron's castle is not the "natural" world, as is often declared,⁷ but a world stocked with cultural artifacts. Before Geraldine ever appears it is haunted by the ghosts of old stories: familiar settings and props function as portents, both for the superstitious and the well-read. The wood and the midnight hour are the "moment's space" where innocence is traditionally put to the test, or when spirits walk abroad; other details — the cock's crow at midnight, the mastiff's unrest, the contracted moon — we know to be art's way of signifying nature's response to human disorder. These so-called "Gothic trappings" ensnare us because they mean nothing ("Tu-whit, tu-who") and too much: like the sighs we seize on as evidence of Christabel's inner life, they gesture to an enigma, something as yet hidden from view. Geraldine makes "answer meet" to these suspensions of the narrative, not by providing closure, but by representing indeterminacy:

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

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

(ll. 58–65)

Precipitating out of the Gothic atmosphere, Geraldine promises to contain in herself an entrapping play of surfaces and shadows; with her appearance suspense resolves into a familiar sign of ambiguity.

Geraldine is a fantasy, produced by the psychic operations of condensation and displacement. On the one hand, her function is to objectify: she intervenes in moments of interpretive crisis as a legible representation — a "vision," a story, and a plot. At the same time, though, she, the story she tells, and the plot she seems to set in motion are all displacing performances of ambiguities she might at first promise to "answer" more decisively. After she pops up, two women dramatize the implied doubleness of the daughter who "stole" along the forest keeping her thoughts to herself (l. 31). Very little else changes. Prompted by an uneasy dream one woman "stole" out of her father's castle; two women return to it "as if in stealth" (l. 120), and by the end of Part I Christabel has simply resumed "fearfully dreaming," at least according to the narrator (l. 294). The spell that becomes "lord of her utterance" (l. 268) that night does no more than render explicit the inhibition of her "telling" already operative in the opening scene of the poem, where her silence was obscurely connected to the brooding, dreaming "lord" of the castle, the father who loved the daughter "so well." By the end of the poem we have simply returned to where we began: Christabel is "only praying" once again, this time at the "old" Baron's feet, and once again Geraldine is on "the other side" (l. 614).

While it proposes an answer to the question "who art thou?" this reading only makes Christabel's second question to Geraldine more problematic: Geraldine is a fantasy, but she does not seem to "come from" any locatable place. The many source studies of the poem have shown that her origins are as much in literature as in Christabel: she first appears to the latter as a highly aestheticized object, and first speaks, many readers think to her discredit, in a highly encoded discourse. A material, communally available representation, she could have been dreamed up by any of the characters to whom she appears in the course of the poem — by the uneasy dreamer Christabel, but also by the Baron, into whose castle she steals while he is asleep, and, Christabel suggests, dreaming uneasily (l. 165), or by Bracy, whose dream of her seems to "live upon [his] eye" the next day (l. 559). She could even be part of *our* dream. For in "Christabel" as in all of his poems of the supernatural, Coleridge plots to turn us into dreamers — to "procure" our "willing suspension of disbelief," our happy relinquishment of the reality

principle. In "Christabel" as in dreams there is no version of the negative: questions raise possibilities that are neither confirmed nor wholly dismissed ("Is it the wind . . . ? / There is not wind enough . . ." [ll. 44–5]). Tags drift from one "lady" to another, suggesting the affinity of apparent adversaries; signs are familiar yet unreadable, laden with associations which neither exclude each other nor resolve into univocality.

Geraldine intervenes into these several dreamlike states as a figure of the imaginary itself – a figure whose legibility derives from its status within the symbolic order. She obeys the laws which structure all psychic phenomena, including dreams, jokes, and hysteria, the malady which allowed Freud to "discover" these very laws. The latter, however, do not explain why *particular* representations become collectively privileged. Why, at moments when they brush with the (il-)logic of the unconscious, do subjects automatically, even hysterically, produce certain *gendered* sights and stories? – produce the image of a radically divided woman, or of two women in each other's arms; and produce the story of a woman who seduces, and/or is seduced, abducted, and silenced by a father, a seducer, and/or a ruffian? This story, including all the ambiguities that make it hard to "tell," is of course the story of hysteria as told by Burton, and later, painstakingly reconstructed by Freud from its plural, displacing performances on the bodies of women. Even the common reader would know it, however, for it describes all the permutations of the romance plot – a form largely, but not exclusively, associated with a body of popular, "feminine" literature.

If a body like Geraldine's pops up from behind a tree when all the witnesses are in the woods, it is no accident: everyone thinks feminine forms appropriately represent the dangers and attractions of fantasy life. Coleridge, who dramatized the highly overdetermined romance/hysteria plot in "Christabel" and happily flaunted feminine bodies when it suited him, was no exception. But I want to argue, first by looking at his generic play, and then by examining his treatment of the family romance, that in "Christabel" he was also mockingly obtruding a conspiracy to view, allowing us to see "feminine" genre and gender alike as cultural fantasy.

III

"Christabel's" narrators are themselves hysterics. The poem's interlocutor and respondent mime the entanglement of Geraldine and Christabel – I call them "they," but it is not clear if we hear two voices or one. Like the women they describe, they are overmastered by "visions." Repeatedly, they abandon an authoritative point of view to fall into the story's present; or they engage in transferential exchanges with the characters whose plot they are narrating. In the opening scene, for example, one of them plunges into the tale to plead to and for Christabel: "Hush, beating heart of Christabel!

/ Jesu, Maria, shield her well!" As if she hears, a stanza later Christabel cries out, "Mary mother, save me now!" (ll. 53–4, 69). Further on, the sequence is reversed when the speaker seems to take up Christabel's speech. She has just assured Geraldine that Sir Leoline will "guide and guard [her] safe and free" (l. 110); although the narrators generally are not as trusting as Christabel, one seems inspired by her confidence to echo her, twice: "So free from danger, free from fear / They crossed the court: right glad they were" (ll. 135–6, 143–4).

These narrators create the conditions and logic of dream: like them, and because of them, the reader is impotent to decide the poem's ambiguities from a position outside its fictions. Furthermore, the poem's "fictions" seem to be about little else than these formal slippages. The repressed of "Christabel's" dreamwork is almost too visible to be seen – not a particular psychic content but literary conventions themselves, like those which demand that narrators speak from privileged points of view, and important for this argument, bodies of conventions or "genres." "Christabel" obtrudes genre to our notice. The Gothic atmosphere of the first stanza, with its enumerations of ominously coincident bird and clock noises, goes slightly bad in the second – partly because of the very presence of the shocking "mastiff bitch," but also because both mastiff and narrator become heady with coincidence: making answer to the clock, "Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour . . . Sixteen short howls, not over loud," she becomes an obvious piece of Gothic machinery (ll. 10–13). A similar generic disturbance occurs between Part I, told more or less in the "tale of terror" convention, and its conclusion, which recapitulates the story in a new convention, that of sentimental fiction. Suddenly Christabel "means" "a bourgeois lady of delicate, even saccharine, sensibility": "Her face, oh call it fair not pale, / And both blue eyes more bright than clear, / Each about to have a tear" (ll. 289–91). As suddenly, the narrators are exposed in a desperate act of wielding genre, using convention to force legibility on a sight that won't be explained.

Once we become aware of these instabilities, no stretch of the poem is exempt. In life women might faint, dogs might moan, and fires might flare up without anyone remarking it; if these coincide in story, they mean something. When they coincide in the overloaded, tonally unsettling Part I of "Christabel" they simultaneously draw attention to themselves as elements of a code. Although we may think of genres as vessels which successive authors infuse with original content, "Christabel's" "originality" is to expose them as the means by which significance is produced and contained.

This analysis raises the issue of the generic status of "Christabel." What is its literary genre? But also, what genre of psychic phenomenon does the poem aspire to – is it like a dream, as we first proposed, or like a joke? The latter question may not immediately seem important, since jokes and dreams

have so much in common: like hysteria, they work by condensation and displacement to bring the repressed to light.⁸ But for the poem's first readers, at least, it clearly mattered which was which. The reviewers of 1816 fiercely protested the poem's "licentious" mixing of joke and dream, categories of psychic phenomena which they translated into literary categories: was "Christabel" a bit of "doggerel," a wild, weird tale of terror, or a fantastic combination of the two? (Modern readers, less tuned to genre play, have decided the question by not hearing the jokes.)⁹ Coleridge's contemporaries recognized that jokes and dreams demand different attitudes: if one responds to "Christabel" as though it were just a wild weird tale, and it turns out to be a joke, then the joke is on oneself. "Christabel" frightened its reviewers, not because it was such a successful tale of terror, but because they couldn't decide what sort of tale it was.

"Christabel" made its first readers hysterical because it is not one genre or another but a joke on our desire to decide genre. As such, it turned a "merely" formal question into a matter of oneupmanship. Most of the critics responded by redirecting the joke, giving the impression that it was on the poem and the author. Coleridge, they claimed, mixed the genres of joke and dream, not as a joke, but in a dream. What is telling is their almost universal decision to recast these issues of literary and formal mastery into the more obviously charged and manageable terms of sexual difference. According to them, the poem was, after all, just one of those tales of terror which ladies like to read ("For what woman of fashion would not purchase a book recommended by Lord Byron?" asks the *Anti-Jacobin*¹⁰); the author, variously described as an "enchanted virgin," an "old nurse," a "dreamer" – by implication, a hysteric – simply could not control the discourses that spoke through him like so many "lords" of his utterance.¹¹

Gendering the formal question, the reviewers reenact the scene of Geraldine's first appearance: then, too, a variety of characters responded to indeterminacy by producing a feminine body at once utterly conventional and too full of significance. In critical discourse as in fantasy life, it seems, feminine forms – the derogated genres of the circulating library, the feminized body of the author, or the body of Geraldine – represent the enigma of form itself. Female bodies "naturally" seem to figure an ungraspable truth: that form, habitually viewed as the arbitrary, contingent vessel of more enduring meanings, is yet the source and determinant of all meanings, whether the subject's or the world's.

Displacing what is problematic about form onto the feminine gender ultimately serves the hypothetical authenticity and integrity of masculine gender and "manly" language. Look, for example, at the opening lines of the passage Hazlitt selects as the only "genuine burst of humanity" "worthy of the author" in the whole poem – the only place where "no dream oppresses him, no spell binds him"¹²:

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus it chanced, as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.

(ll. 408–15)

Hazlitt was not alone in his approbation: many reviewers of the poem quoted this passage with approval, and Coleridge himself called them "the best & sweetest Lines [he] ever wrote."¹³ They are indeed outstanding – the only moment, in this tale about mysterious exchanges among women, when an already-past, already-interpreted, fully-breached male friendship is encountered. For those of us who don't equate "manliness" with universality and authenticity, this unremarked confluence of masculine subject-matter and "genuine" discourse is of course suspicious: it's not *simply* purity of style that made this passage the standard against which all other Christabellian discourse could be measured and found "licentious," "indecorous," "affected" – in short, effeminate.

But here, we are anticipated by the passage itself, which exposes "manliness" as a gendered convention. When the narrator begins this impassioned flight, we assume he speaks from privileged knowledge: why else such drama? Several lines later, though, he betrays that this is all something he has "divined," something that may have chanced. "Chancing" on a situation that really spoke to him – a ruined manly friendship – the narrator has constructed a "divination" based on what he knows – about constancy (it isn't to be found on earth), life (it's thorny), and youth (it's vain). Although he is more caught up in his speech than she, his voice is as "hollow" as Geraldine's. His flight or "genuine burst of humanity" is a fit of the mother, and a mocking treatment of manly discourse on the part of Coleridge, whose later accession to the going opinion was either a private joke or a guilty, revisionary reading of his licentious youth. If this tonal instability was lost on "Christabel's" reviewers, it can only be because, like the narrator himself, they were reading hysterically: a "vision" of autonomous male identities caused them automatically to produce a set of received ideas about manly discourse.

"Christabel" exposes the conventionality of manly authenticity and the giddiness of manly decorum; in the same move, it suggests that attributing hysteria to feminine forms is a hysterical response to a more general condition. In the poem as elsewhere, "the feminine" is the locus of erotic and generic license: this can have the exciting charge of perversity or

madness, or can seem absolutely conventional, affected. "Christabel" contrives to have these alternatives redound on the reader, who continually feels mad or just stupid, unable to "tell" how to characterize the verse at any given point. Here is Christabel "imprisoned" in the arms of Geraldine:

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?
 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. 292–301)

Geraldine's arms, the scene of the close embrace, and the conclusion as a whole, which recasts Part I as a sentimental narrative – all in some sense work to imprison the significances of the text. Yet the scenario only imperfectly traps, and closes not at all, the questions which circulated through Part I. Identity is still a matter of debate, and still hangs on a suggestively ambiguous "she" ("Can this be she?"). Even the women's gender identities and roles are undecidable, their single embrace "read" by multiple, superimposed relationships. Geraldine, a "lady" like Christabel, is also sleeping with Christabel; a "worker of harms," a ruffian-like assaulter of unspecified gender, she is also like a "mild," protective mother. If in keeping with the sentimentality of this section of the poem, the mother/child analogy is introduced to clean up the post-coital embrace of the women, it redounds to suggest the eroticism of maternal attention. These ghostly stories, all already raised in the text of Part I, work to create the compellingly charged erotic ambivalence of "Christabel" – ambivalence about becoming absorbed into a body which may be "the same" as one's own, or may belong to an adversary, a "worker of harms," and which is associated with, or represented by, the maternal body.

Christabel's situation, including, perhaps her feminine situation, is contagious. The narrator, who seems overmastered by the very spell he is describing, can only direct us to a "sight" ("And lo!"), the significance of which he "cannot tell." His speech breaks down before the woman who is "dreaming fearfully, / Fearfully dreaming," before the form that may conceal "that alone, which is."

The narrator circles round but cannot tell the enigma of form, of the body or sign that is at once meaningless and too full of significance. His own

discourse repeats the paradox of the "sight," and becomes a locus of the reader's interpretive breakdown. His lament strikes us as coming from "genuine" distress at the remembrance of Christabel's horrible predicament. But particularly in context, the lines –

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
 Asleep and dreaming fearfully,
 Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,
 Dreaming that alone which is –

raise the ghost of a sentimental style that as a matter of course suppresses all distressing sights and implications, while coyly directing the reader to what's not being said. To decide the narrator's credibility – is he bewildered or merely "affected," effeminate; could he even be camping it up? – it is necessary to bring genre to bear, to decide whether Gothic or sentimental romance is a determining convention. This is simultaneously to recognize that the voice we have been hearing cannot be authentic – if mad, it speaks in the tale of terror's legislated mad discourse; that genres are constructs which produce meaning for the subject; and that genres, like fantasy, reproduce the indeterminacies they at first appear to limit or control. Our relation to Christabel's narrators is like theirs to Christabel: the enigmatic form of their discourse turns us into hysterical readers, subject to the possessing, conventional bodies that that discourse raises in us.

IV

"Christabel's" romance plot suggests that our culture's hysterical relation to feminine forms – or its hysterical feminization of form – has its origins in the family romance. The poem invites us to distinguish between paternal and feminine orders of experience. The father's sphere is the Law – a legislative, symbolic order structured according to a divisive logic:

Each matin bell, the Baron saith,
 Knells us back to a world of death.
 These words Sir Leoline first said,
 When he rose and found his lady dead:
 These words Sir Leoline will say
 Many a morn to his dying day!

And hence the custom and law began
 That still at dawn the sacristan,
 Who duly pulls the heavy bell,
 Five and forty beads must tell

Between each stroke – a warning knell,
Which not a soul can choose but hear
From Bratha Head to Wyndermere.

(ll. 332–44)

The Baron's response to a traumatic event is to commemorate it. Every day, punctually, he relives the loss of "his lady," spacing and controlling the recurrences of his sorrow. By institutionalizing the observance, he turns a private grief into a public ceremony. The compulsive becomes the compulsory: the sacristan "duly" pulls his bell, and "not a soul can choose but hear."

Separation is something of a habit with the Baron. Three other times during the poem he attempts to stabilize his relation to a disturbing person or event by opening out a "space between" (l. 349). In the past, the narrator "divine[s]," Sir Leoline had been "wroth" with Lord Roland (ll. 412–13). Wrath and the threat of madness precipitate a separation which leaves each scarred (ll. 421–2). The speaker "ween[s]" these scars will never go away and seems to guess right, since the Baron's memory of that friendship revives when Geraldine appears on the scene and tells her story:

Sir Leoline, a moment's space,
Stood gazing on the damsel's face:
And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine
Came back upon his heart again.

(ll. 427–30)

For a second time the Baron experiences maddening confusion, here obscurely related to the striking together of "youthful lord" and "damsel," known and new, past and present, revived love and recognized loss. Once again he becomes wrathful ("His noble heart swelled high with rage" [l. 432]), and introduces a "law" of deathly separation: he will "dislodge" the "reptile souls" of Geraldine's abductors "from the bodies and forms of men" (ll. 442–3). Finally, for a third time the Baron meets "[swelling] rage and pain" (l. 638) and "confusion" (l. 639) with division: in the last stanza of the poem, "turning from his own sweet maid," he leads Geraldine off (l. 653).

The Baron's customs and laws divide and oppose potential "sames" or potentially intermingling parts of "the same." In contrast, femininity bewilders the narrator because one can never tell if identities and differences are constant, "the same": "Can this be she, / The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?" (ll. 296–7); "And Christabel awoke and spied / The same who lay down by her side – / Oh rather say, the same . . ." (ll. 370–1). Tales, glances, and verbal tags circulate between Christabel and Geraldine throughout the poem: each is a "lady," each makes "answer meet" to the

other. These exchanges could be said to obey the law of "the mother." Her function has puzzled some critics, who have found it hard to reconcile her angelic guardianship of Christabel with her likeness to Geraldine.¹⁴ Coleridge, however, intended "Christabel's" mother to be a punning, rather than a stable, character. Referring simultaneously to the malady of hysteria, the womb whose vaporish fantasies were thought to block the hysteric's speech, and the female parent, "the mother" is an exemplarily vagrant sign, whose shifts of meaning obey the very "laws" which determine the characteristic displacements of hysteria.

The mother escapes the Baron's divisive categories. Neither opposites nor "the same," Geraldine and Christabel are identically self-divided, each subject to a "sight" or "weight" whose history and effects she "cannot tell." The Baron might attempt to redress such duplicity by dislodging offending "souls" from the "bodies and forms" they occupy. The "mother," however, is neither spirit nor body. Dying the hour Christabel was born, she inhabits her daughter as an already-dislodged form, or in psychoanalytic terms, as an alien internal entity or fantasy.¹⁵ At times Christabel feels this "weight" as the fully external, "weary weight" of Geraldine (l. 131), at times as an inner "vision" which "falls" on her. Where the Baron imagines parenthood bestowing on him all the privileges of ownership ("his own sweet maid"), possession by the "mother" breaks down privilege, including that of an original, controlling term. The "weight" or "sight" is both within and without, both the fantasy that cannot be told and the representation that makes it legible.

The Baron also remembers the mother by a weary weight, but he gets someone else to heft it: every morning his sacristan "duly pulls the heavy bell" which "not a soul can choose but hear." Obviously the organizations we have been calling the father's and the mother's exist in some relation to one another. A feminist reading of this relation might charge the Law with producing hysterics, women who "cannot tell" what ails them because the Law legislates against every voice but its own. The Baron stifles the daughter by his oppressive, deathly presence: stealing back into his castle with Geraldine, Christabel passes his room "as still as death / With stifled breath" (l. 171). "The mother" – the malady of hysteria – symptomatically represents the daughter's internalization of patriarchal Law. This reading is supported by Burton, who laid the daughter's troubles on the pseudopoliticians, and by Geraldine, who identifies the curse that prevents Christabel from "telling" as masculine prohibition: the sign which seals them both up is a "lord" of utterance and an "overmastering" spell.

A plot as popular as this one, however, is probably overdetermined. "Christabel" invites at least two other readings of the relation between hysteria and the Law. First, that hysteria produces the Law: repeatedly, the Baron opens out a space between himself and perceived threats in order to "shield" himself from overmastering confusion or madness. Second, that the

Law is just one form of hysteria. According to the narrator, the Baron's cutting efforts leave him internally scarred. The space between is also a mark within, from which no "shield" can protect him. Like the hysteric he is always vulnerable to a recurrence of "swelling" confusion, a revival of the already-internalized mark, to which he responds with another legislative cut. The Law resembles hysteria in its defenses and effects: it attempts to decide irresolution by producing something "on the other side," and its cuts leave the legislator subject to recurrences.¹⁶

"Christabel" invites us to decide there is only one significant "sight" – Geraldine's bosom; and to infer that it is women who can have no discourse within the Law. But at the same time it allows us to see hysteria as the coincidence of superimposed fields: as a metaphysical condition of the speaking subject, as a malady historically affecting women who suffer under patriarchal Law, and as a fantasy of patriarchal culture – a representation which figures the subject's alienation from the symbolic order on the bodies of women. Christabel and Geraldine, who enter the Baron's castle while he sleeps, enact their 'own' fantasy and his dream.

To account for the power of this dream, we might try tracing it back to the origin. At the moment the Baron is about to cast off his only child, a protesting narrator invokes the mother:

Why is thy cheek so wan and wild,
 Sir Leoline? Thy only child
 Lies at thy feet, thy joy, thy pride,
 So fair, so innocent, so mild;
 The same, for whom thy lady died!
 O by the pangs of her dear mother
 Think thou no evil of thy child!
 For her, and thee, and for no other,
 She prayed the moment ere she died:
 Prayed that the babe for whom she died,
 Might prove her dear lord's joy and pride!
 That prayer her deadly pangs beguiled,
 Sir Leoline!
 And wouldst thou wrong thy only child,
 Her child and thine?

(ll. 621–35)

These lines refer us back to the opening of Part II, where custom and law were instituted in response to a "lady's" death. This "lady" was also a mother, the narrator reminds us here; her death was simultaneous with a birth, her "pangs" – at once labor and death pangs – were beguiled by prayers, her suffering mingled with joy.

The Baron's law is an interpretive moment: he decides to read the occasion as a death only. His action anticipates his later disavowal of Christabel, which occurs almost as if in response to the narrator's reminder that she is "[thy lady's] child and thine"; and it resonates with Geraldine's response when, diverted from her plot for a moment as love for Christabel and longing for the mother rise up in her, she collects herself by flinging off the latter ("Off, wandering mother!" (l. 205)). In each case, a feminine body comes to represent a threat to the wishfully autonomous self. "Christabel," with its punning allusions to "the mother," invites us to speculate that the "law" of gender, which legislates the systematic exclusion of feminine forms, is connected to the experience of maternal attention. In this view, representations of feminine bodies as sites of non-self-identity all take revenge on the maternal body, which, in its historical role as the first "worker of harms," is the agent through which identity is constituted on a split. The mother "wounds" with her love, constituting the subject as originally, irreducibly divided, marked by the meanings and desires of the Other.

This reading, however, may play into the hands of the patriarchs. Historically, they have used maternity to ground a question of origins; they have used gender to naturalize what is in fact a function of genre – of constructs which are only meaningful within an already-originated cultural order. To suggest that misogyny can be traced to experience of the mother, to attribute it to blind revenge for the subject's condition, is to give it a sort of tragic weight. It's also to forget the tone of "Christabel." The urbane ironist and even the apparently less controlled patriarch of that poem suggest that the projects of culture are at once more political and more finessed than what we've just described. The Baron's exclusion and readmission of women amounts to a kind of play. He guards his fantasized autonomy by opening out spaces between – between bodies, genders, generations. He lives in a deathly, "dreary" world, until his "dream" of radically split women reanimates it with desire. With the appearance of Geraldine, the threat of abduction – a threat for every subject in discourse – can be rewritten, flirted with, in dreams of seduction which repeat, at a safe distance, the "confusions" of first love. That night, a fantasized feminine body – single yet double, like the mother's when pregnant with child, or the hysteric's when inhabited by the vaporish conceptions of an origin which is never *her* origin – performs exchanges with another body like her own. These women figure but only imperfectly contain impropriety, allowing its threats and attractions to return to the Baron's world as a taint. Geraldine moves from Christabel's bed to his arms, supplanting the daughter who had supplanted the mother; for a moment, she produces in him the illusion that one can "forget... age" (l. 431) and all that has intervened, and recapture the fantasized past, when exchanges traversed the laws of self-identity and even the laws of gender.

V

Coleridge, who capitalizes on the potential of feminine bodies to eroticize masculine discourse, is himself a pseudopolitician; at the same time, like the hysteric he seems to counter the Law. Drawing together matters of form and desire, his discussion of meter in the Preface to "Christabel" nicely illustrates this double relation to the symbolic order. On the one hand, the principle the author lays down is strikingly consonant with the Baron's tolling "custom and law":

I have only to add that the metre of Christabel is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.

"Christabel's" metrics are figured in the poem as the ringing of the Baron's clock and matin bell. Coleridge's "principle," however, is designed to accommodate, not just the Baron, who would institute unvarying repetition, but also the movement of desire, "transition[s] in the nature of the imagery or passion."

Coleridge's meter, or more broadly, his joking treatment of gender and genre, can thus be seen as a compromise between the Law's reificatory strategies and the potentially wanton, disruptive liveliness of passion – a compromise which ultimately benefits the ironist who acquiesces to the laws he also exposes as interested. Yet Coleridge's play, which mocks the law of gender/genre by too faithfully reinscribing its conventions, also opens up the possibility of a more radical collapse between the positions of patriarch, hysteric, and ironist: it exposes the wantonness of the Law, and allows one to discover the laws of desire; it suggests that the Law itself may be inseparable from the operations of desire. When Bracy the Bard hears the Baron's deathly matin bell, he declares, "So let it knell!"–

There is no lack of such, I ween,
As well fill up the space between.
In Langdale Pike and Witch's Lair,
And Dungeon-ghyll so foully rent,
With ropes of rock and bells of air
Three sinful sextons' ghosts are pent,
Who all give back, one after t'other,

The death-note to their living brother;
And oft too, by the knell offended,
Just as their one! two! three! is ended,
The devil mocks the doleful tale
With a merry peal from Borodale.

(ll. 348–59)

Bracy's accession echoes Christabel's words at the end of Part I, when she announces her obedience to Geraldine's request: "So let it be!" (l. 235). Bracy is in league with the hysteric, and Coleridge with them all – and all submit to the Law. When Christabel steals into her father's house with Geraldine, we "cannot tell" if her silence is the absolute solicitude of a dutiful daughter or a sign of subversive intent: does hysteria come from too much or too little respect for the father? In a sense it doesn't matter, since the effects are the same for the Baron and us: her very unreadability draws out and mocks his and our possessing desire to decide meaning. Her strategy resembles Bracy's – apparently without doing anything himself, he simply "lets" the Law mock its own voice. It echoes through hollow, rent spaces, which in dutifully returning its knell, elude its efforts to control the significance of an event. "Telling" notes become the occasion of ghostly echoes, which in turn generate Bracy's lively ghost stories; finally, as if by way of commentary, the "devil" makes merry mockery of the whole phenomenon. The passage describes in little the narrative tactics of "Christabel." By too-dutiful accession to the laws of gender and genre, "Christabel" exposes their strategies to view, letting the Law subvert itself.

NOTES

- 1 Quotations from "Christabel" and its preface are taken from EHC.
- 2 See Luther (1976) for the argument that Christabel is a reader of romances.
- 3 Tomlinson (1973) 235; Adair (1967) 146.
- 4 Burton (1977) 416. Future references to this edition appear in the text.
- 5 In "Sir Cauline," the ballad from which Coleridge took the name Christabel, this is the case: that Christabel's lover is dismissed by her father.
- 6 See, e.g., Basler (1948) 41; Enscoe (1967) 44–5; Spatz (1975) 112–13; Schapiro (1983) 61–85.
- 7 See, e.g., Enscoe (1967) 43; Beer (1977) 187; and Piper (1978) 216–27.
- 8 Or so Freud claims, Freud (1963) 159–80.
- 9 For examples of the reviews, see Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* (1977) ii. 666, 239. Modern critics sometimes notice tonal or generic instability as "falls" into Gothic trickery, into caricature of the Gothic, or into sentimentality; see e.g., Schulz (1963) 66–71; and Edwards and Emslie (1971) 328. The latter suggest these discrepancies are intended to shock.
- 10 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* (1977) i. 23.

- 11 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* (1977) i. 373; ii. 866; ii. 531. I discuss these reviews more fully in Swann (1985).
- 12 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* (1977) ii. 531.
- 13 Griggs iii. 435.
- 14 See, e.g., Delson (1980); and Enscoe (1967) 46.
- 15 My understanding of fantasy here follows that of Laplanche and Pontalis (1968).
- 16 My argument here is indebted to Richard Rand's discussion of the ubiquitous "mark" in "Geraldine," Rand (1978).

Shelley