

**No Familiar Spirit: Aesthetic Experience and
Radical Enquiry in the Literature of Early
Romanticism**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

March, 1992

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Erratum: The passage at the top of page xi should read "Eagleton does not in this respect discriminate between post-modernisms".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was completed with the assistance of a Commonwealth Postgraduate Research Award.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Judith Barbour, for her remarkable patience and generous assistance not less than for her searching scholarship.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviated titles by Coleridge other than the *Notebooks* and the *Collected Letters* are from *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. K. Coburn, Routledge, London 1969-

- BL* *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, 1983
- TT* *Table Talk Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, ed. Carl Woodring 2 vols, 1990
- QN* *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. K. Coburn, 4 vols, Routledge, London 1957-
- CL* *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1956-71
- PW* *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire, Oxford 5 vols, 1940-9
- PrW* *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser, 3 vols, Oxford 1974

Introduction: Crossing the Line

All philosophers share this common error: they proceed from contemporary man and think they can reach their goal through an analysis of this man. Automatically they think of "man" as an eternal verity, as something abiding in the whirlpool, as a sure measure of things. Everything that the philosopher says about man, however, is at bottom no more than a testimony about the man of a very limited period. Lack of a historical sense is the original error of all philosophers . . .

Friedrich Nietzsche

all confusion is painful.

S. T. C.

Film-makers - cinematographers and directors - have an expression for something which in general they should not do; not, that is, if they wish to work within the dominant conventions of cinematic realism. "Crossing the line" induces a disorienting, "unnatural" reversal of perspective, which can best be explained in terms of a basic "two-shot": if an imaginary line were to be drawn between two people who if only by virtue of being in the same shot are in some sort of relation with each other, then "crossing the line" would refer to a sequence which brought into close proximity views taken from both sides of that line. That this can be a literary no less than a cinematic phenomenon is indicated by Coleridge's criticisms of Spenser's allegory, discussed in Part III below, in which it is alleged that "that which is and may be known, but cannot *appear* from the given point of view, is confounded with the visible".¹ This would be unsettling provided that it were not accompanied by some naturalising device such as attributing one of these perspectives to a third character - an eavesdropper, for example. Any such unmodified effect threatens the fiction of a

¹ Annotations to Robert Anderson's *Poets of Great Britain* in G. Whalley ed. *Marginalia* vol. i, *CW* vol. 12 (Princeton 1980) p. 54.

unified point of view belonging to some privileged observer, a disembodied eavesdropper such as God perhaps or, to stick with the theme of cognitive privilege, a philosophical systematiser, a "Spy Nozy" who strives not to get caught out as in Coleridge's anecdote in the tenth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*. In that instance the joke depends upon the presumed *naïveté* of the person who, for whatever reason having no legitimate part in a rather erudite discussion, crosses the line by identifying himself with its subject.

Like all good stories Coleridge's anecdote has many uses. What if it is not the comic "light relief" but the poetic or philosophic self which crosses the line? A case in point would be Coleridge's friend Wordsworth, the other person who was being spied upon, in his description of crossing the Alps in the sixth book of *The Prelude*. In Coleridge's story the result is not only exoneration from the suspicion of Jacobinism but a positive enhancement of authority as the anecdote is employed in attributing to himself a particular cultural and political competence and trustworthiness. In Wordsworth's dialectic of self-consciousness the identification of the naïve with the perspicuous person is no joke because here the line is crossed and then re-crossed as ignorance is transformed into knowledge. In this reverse motion or retrospection error itself has crossed the line, becoming unavoidable, in a manner of speaking "transcendental".

In the following discussion the sublime is treated as one moment of a general aesthetic in which it serves as an enabling figure for authoritative transmissions, transactions, or translations which may be political, pedagogical or sexual but are in any case textual. Such a general aesthetic, treated here mainly in the writings of Burke and of Coleridge up to the time of the publication of the *Biographia*, is centred on conjunctions of the contingency, unpredictability and, at times, the vulnerability of the finite, historically particular self with the inclusive dynamics and sweeping vistas of cultural and historical transformation.

The modern concept of the aesthetic as a machine for effecting dangerous or perplexing transitions developed, at least in the histories which we presently read and write, in an age of transition which also saw the birth of the humanities as something distinct from and frequently opposed to science, and of the dominant forms of literary scholarship, including, for us, derivatives of the "practical criticism" of Coleridge. This last may or may not be Coleridge's legitimate child, it may be of the nature of such attributions that they remain precarious, but there has long been a recognisable critical interest in declaring him its illegitimate father, which finds a strident contemporary^q voice in aspects of the scholarship of Norman Fruman. Attempts by modern literary scholarship to provide itself with a historical derivation as a contribution to its self-understanding sooner or later must come to terms with Coleridge's endeavour to provide it with a philosophical deduction for the same purpose. Like the autobiographical narrative and the transcendental deduction which are recounted or forshadowed^e in the text, these lines of descent converge in the concept of imagination, or more precisely in the moment of articulation and of sundering which is the desynonymisation of imagination and fancy in the thirteenth chapter. But they must do so via the "letter from a friend" which with both a flagrant arbitrariness and a kind of uncanny inevitability sunders the "practical criticism" of the second volume from the prospect of a philosophical grounding canvassed in the first, and at the same time negotiates the passage between general history and autobiography, and literary history and literary theory.

Contemporary "practical criticism" may be defined by the conjunction of an idealist thematics with an empiricist methodology, with a hermeneutics which is at once extremely sophisticated and determinedly naïve. The former component accounts for the vast majority of whatever in the discipline concerns the delimiting of an aesthetic specificity, the constitution of a distinct object of study and the determination of that study as literary *criticism*, while the latter takes care of understanding, of assimilating that specificity to

empirical experience. If we accept Paul de Man's suggestion that New Criticism mistook the totalising propensities of the hermeneutic model for the unity of the text,² we could add that it mistook the incoherence of its own discourse - represented by the failure of the hermeneutic circle ever to close - for the sublimity of the text. This literary-critical sublime would be a kind of negative theology situated in relation to the gap, the sharp demarcation between method and theme, or between reading and understanding, generated within the discourse of traditional literary studies itself. If nothing that we say about the texts we read finally quite makes sense it must be because there is something ineffable about great works of literature, something whereof we must be silent, but with a silence made eloquent by reverence. The *Biographia* is exemplary here because the truncation of the transcendental deduction which is also the sundering of a notionally ideal dimension of constitution from one of reception reduces imagination from the status of a constitutive textual moment which emerges and recedes in the course of the production of the work to a theme or "result" capable of being appropriated by an empiricist interpretation of the method of the second volume. As theme imagination is transported, or more precisely is quoted, across the gap between the two volumes and all the more readily because it already appears in the first volume as quoted from the unwritten deduction. It is in fact only ever quoted, never produced.

A comparable instance is to be found in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", which has proved another interesting crux for scholarship. Opinion remains divided about the status of the moral which the Mariner attributes to his narrative, which has every appearance of its being yet another discontinuous "result", a suspiciously arbitrary but eminently quotable thematisation. To a significant degree the field remains contested by partisans of either the

² Paul de Man, "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism" in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (revised ed.) (London 1983) p. 29.

narrative or the moral. What is the status of this gap which has excised what is quoted? What if imagination were both the name of this gap and of the theme or concept which would fill or conceal it? What if, then, imagination (and with it dialectics, hermeneutics, etc.) designated the oscillation between the production and the occlusion of that gap, between a theme or themes in general and some unthematized or barely thematized moment? If this were so then that which is "real" in Coleridge's realism (all too easily dismissed as a laborious effort to find a transcendental basis for what a vernacular empiricism has already apprehended) is just this ambit of the theme which cannot be other than discontinuous with the notion of a production, derivation or ground. In this case imagination would embrace the real not in order to secure and redeem it, but to detach it once and for all from the naturalisms of habit and custom which were defended so eloquently by Burke. Coleridge's conservative demand that rational critique should be compatible with received forms of authority would be imperilled at this point.

In *Biographia* Chapter IV Coleridge attempts a restoration of poetic principle, which is presented as having originally been derived from his friend's verse,³ from the confusion into which it has descended partly through Wordsworth's influence. He aims to ~~to~~ desynonymise Wordsworth.

. . . it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it was my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their *poetic* fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots, as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.⁴

³ *BL* i, p. 82.

⁴ *BL* i, p. 88.

The focus of the present thesis is this Coleridgean radicalism, and the associated account of the text as aesthetic object, which is posited as a transitional moment between production and reception. It also examines related aspects of the contemporary critical production of Coleridge's texts. Blake's writings have been largely excluded from this study because their relation to contemporary scholarship is for historical reasons not so troublingly intimate, although his aesthetic has exerted what I hope will be a discernable pressure on the development of the argument. The expression "Early Romanticism" in the title, then, refers to works of Coleridge and Wordsworth before 1817, and especially where poetry is concerned before 1800, the 1790's being the period in which the aesthetic of early Romanticism is established. The main focus is the *Biographia*, Coleridge's most extended explanation of that aesthetic, especially the first volume, the Lectures on Revealed Religion, and among the verse three failed collaborations with Wordsworth, "The Three Graves", "The Wanderings of Cain" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The latter poem is given particular prominence, following Coleridge, as an instance of his aesthetic differences with Wordsworth, and therefore of important trends in his other verse. It is prospectively annexed to the argument of the *Biographia* at the conclusion of Chapter XIII. Wordsworth is discussed in relation to his polemical presentation in the *Biographia* as genial if misguided poet but is not for reasons of space afforded his deserved status as rival theorist.

In addition this is a study of Edmund Burke's conservative radicalism in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) and in the writings on the French revolution, particularly the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In the light of Burke's explicit grounding of political theory on an aesthetic and a hermeneutics the term "revolution" encompasses not just a class of events which like any conceptual category must be constructed in language, but as the name of a constructive and destructive moment operative alike in the death and regeneration of states and in

the production and dissolution of concepts. As is well known, Burke's anti-type of revolution is aesthesis, and it is not too much to say that for Burke history is constituted by the dialectic of revolution and the aesthetic. I do not propose in this connection to trace influences of Burke upon the two poets so much as to conduct a comparative study.

The relation of history and historicisms to the aesthetic provides the basis of the discussion since criticism of post-structuralism is most often voiced in the name of "history", when not simply in that of "meaning". Recently Nigel Leask (*The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* ⁵), has developed a powerful and inst^rinctive argu[^]ment centred on the dominance of the concept of mystery or *pseudos* in Coleridge's thinking after 1817, the year of the publication of the *Biographia*. Leask discerns a continuity between Coleridge's early radicalism, based not on French Jacobinism but on seventeenth century English "Commonwealth" ideology, and his philosophical idealism when it was most influenced by Schelling, up to 1817. The two volumes of the *Biographia* would exemplify Coleridge's trajectory from the "civic" monism of the One Life and of Schelling, for whom knowledge is realisation or enactment, to the "Kantian" dualism which consigned that radicalism to an immanence divorced from all foreseeable prospect of realisation. The key term here is *pseudos* or mystery, the dissimulation of a potentially radical, demystifying esoteric doctrine ("the gnosis afforded by art, the generation of the divine Idea from 'the suppressed Titans of natural [political] desire and appetite'" or "Gods of Chaos"⁶) which would be confined to a select group of "responsible" initiates, in order that it should not compromise temporal authority. This is regarded not so much as a failure of political nerve as the absence of an appropriate constituency

⁵ Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (London and Basingstoke 1988).

⁶ Leask, p. 163.

due to "the failure of the capitalist worldview to construct a viable moral and political defence of . . . 'capitalist man as zoon politikon'".⁷

Is the operation of *pseudos* exhausted by the opposed categories of "Schellingian" monism with its "civic" humanism and of a "Kantian" dualism involving a subjectivised, "Higher Critical" theology? Leask's attempt to "cross the boundaries which have come to separate literature from society, in order to reconnect and problematize the two realms",⁸ to restore the historical accountability of literature, is a demystification or desublimation which is dependent to a significant extent on the exhaustive character of this opposition and that of its aesthetic corollaries, beauty and sublimity respectively. Specifically it would promulgate a beautiful analogy (and relation of dependence) between transcendental argument and empirical history. But as Coleridge realised after 1817, Schelling's "monism" in the *System* of 1800 is not coherent. It already evinces the operation of *pseudos*, and in particular of what Coleridge calls a *proton pseudos*, or fundamental error, a confused privileging of the phenomenal in relation to a supersensible dimension of constitution which *cannot* be conceived of simply by analogy with the objects of empirical experience. Schelling's dialectic of empirical consciousness is disintegrative in character, dependent upon an extra-systematic intervention (*pseudos*) which is aesthetic intuition.

In this connection Jerome Christensen⁹ couples Coleridge and Burke and puts to their writings the question of apostasy. He finds that Coleridgean apostasy (falling away)¹⁰ is constitutive, in a manner which does not escape

⁷ Leask, p. 199.

⁸ Leask, p. 5.

⁹ J. Christensen, "Like a Guilty Thing Surprised": Deconstruction, Coleridge, and the apostasy of Criticism", *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Summer 1986) pp. 769-87.

¹⁰ *CN* iii, N 4449.

historical determination, at once of a "detached" or "disinterested" criticism", of historical reflection and of the political itself as forms of anastasis (return). "The sleep of praxis is the birth of criticism", suggesting that Leask's own radical "civic" humanism may be secretly parasitic upon and so complicit with Coleridge's conservative dualism; that, in short, there is a logic which includes the two positions without being reducible to their more obvious acceptations. This logic, in the form of a Coleridgean theory of writing, reading and the text, is inclusive of without being independent of - without simply nullifying or escaping, without not also being included by - Leask's quite astute political allegory.

Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford 1990) also finds the aesthetic object to be a site of fruitful contradiction, of "real historical complexity". It is "at once the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought".¹¹ The political character of post-modernism is ambiguous because capitalism is contradictory, it is itself "radical", inasmuch as it cannot help espousing a "degraded, emancipatory logic" which links the autonomy of the art work to commodification, to exchange value:

The commodity is the ruin of all distinctive identity, craftily conserving the difference of use-value, but only by dint of subverting it to that sameness-in-difference which for Walter Benjamin was fashion. It transmutes social values to a wilderness of mirrors, as one object contemplates the abstract essence of itself in the looking glass of another. Traversing with superb indifference the divisions of class, sex and race, of high and low, past and present, the commodity appears as an anarchic, iconoclastic force which mocks the obsessive rankings of traditional culture even as it in some sense depends on

¹¹ T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford 1990), p. 9.

them to secure the stable conditions for its own operations.¹²

To this he opposes Benjamin's epiphanic moments of "Kabbalistic correspondence", and he affirms "concrete particularity" and a dialectic:

the final purpose of our universality, of our equal rights to participate in the public definition of meaning and values, is that the unique particularities of individuals may be respected and fulfilled. Particularity returns again at a 'higher' level; difference must pass through identity if it is to come into its own, a position disastrously abandoned by much contemporary theory.¹³

Like Leask's, Eagleton's study is a polemic against "post-modernism", and both single out Paul de Man for criticism.¹⁴ Eagleton recognises "a valuable, resourceful politics" at work but argues that de Man's demystification of the aesthetic is reductive, charging that he "perpetuates, if now in a wholly new style, his earlier hostility to an emancipatory politics";¹⁵ it perpetrates an "extreme reaction" from his earlier fascist sympathies, a "bleakly disillusioned scepticism which threatens to rob the whole concept of truth of its productiveness" and is hostile to "all theories of a purposive, meaningful history".¹⁶ His de Man is a traumatised Lady MacBeth, glowering from amidst the post-war ruins of the temple of European idealism and organicism.

¹² Eagleton, p. 374.

¹³ Eagleton, p. 409.

¹⁴ Leask finds in de Man a "deconstructive scepticism", a "cultural melancholy", complicit with a version of Coleridge's late dualism comprising a tragic relation of culture to history deprived of religious consolation (p. 143)

¹⁵ Eagleton, p. 10

¹⁶ Eagleton, p. 311. Derrida is accused of having maintained a low political profile, and of "libertarian pessimism" (p. 387).

Post-modernism - Eagleton does not discriminate between post-modernisms¹⁷ - is accus^ed of abandoning critique, commitment, and history, and of linking the fate of the aesthetic decisively to that of the commodity, yielding a levelling or attenuated apocalypse. Like Coleridge in the *Biographia*, Eagleton produces no philosophical demonstration of this dialectic - he relies on Marx much as Coleridge relies on Schelling, although without leaving himself open to charges of plagiarism. But what he does produce is a critical poetics, a radical sublime grounded in an act of revolutionary remembrance to form "a bridge between present and future".¹⁸ But as Part II of this thesis will indicate, Eagleton at this point is particul^larly close to Burke. Both orient their arguments as aversion from a false apocalypse, a false aesthetic, which each locates in the real, Burke in Paris after 1789, Eagleton in post-Fordist, post-industrial capitalism two hundred years later. Eagleton's attempt to desynonymise aesthesis concludes that "this leap from history to modernity [by "post-modernism"] has a long history".¹⁹ This thesis is a contribution to the history of the leap which

¹⁷ Eagleton also makes some dubious attributions and some serious errors. He characterises post-modernism as overwhelmingly negative without reference to counter-examples, or discussions of the negative as such; he claims that de Man regards all ideology as naturalising without considering the critique of theory in "The Resistance to Theory" (*The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis 1986, pp. 3-20) or the critical relation between allegory and irony in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* rev. ed. London 1983) - or the specific contexts and objectives of de Man's texts; and most egregious of all, he approvingly quotes Habermas on Adorno and Derrida: "They make a drama of something that should be trivial by now, a fallibilist conception of truth and knowledge. Even I learnt this from Popper!" (p. 379). This confusion of what in Derrida's case might be termed an exploration of the constitution of truth and falsity with Popper's falsification calls into question the quality of Eagleton's engagement with the texts he is criticising. More generally it is noteworthy that he does not undertake a reading of any of Derrida's texts in the rather large and comprehensive book on aesthetics which would refute him.

¹⁸ Eagleton, p. 409.

¹⁹ Eagleton, p. 415.

Eagleton makes in the other direction, crossing the line from apocalyptic modernity to history.

Part I of this thesis, "Imagination and the Possibility of Philosophy", examines "double descent" in Schelling and the *Biographia*, distinguishing between *pseudos* and Freud's *proton pseudos* - an original, irreducible duplicity, precedence of inscription over significance.

Part II, "A Politics and an Aesthetics of Terror", is a reading of Coleridge's political lectures of 1795 and of his transition to the distinctive poetry of imagination which, with Wordsworth's verse, launched what we would recognise as the Romantic aesthetic. Comparisons and contrasts are made with Edmund Burke's political aesthetic.

Part III, "A Sign in the Element", ^c concerned mainly with "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", traces the elaboration, under the rubric of original evil, of the "*proton pseudos*" theme in relation not to theory, as in the *Biographia*, but to practice and to politics.

Part IV, "The Poet in the *Biographia*", treats the double descent of the aesthetic of the early Romantics in terms of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's reading and rewriting of each other.

I

Imagination and the Possibility of Philosophy:
Biographia Literaria Chapters VI-XIII

FROM CHAOS TO COSMOS

Coleridge's proposed transcendental deduction of the imagination in the thirteenth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria* breaks off at a crucial point, just before the explication of what we would call the dialectical synthesis of two "counteracting forces". Something of what is at issue in this transition is indicated in note 4265 (1815), apparently a draft for the ten theses of Chapter XII. The second thesis here is more expansive than the rather terse formulation which was published:

Knowledge must either be an endless Cycle, a perpetual interfusion of all particular Positions, each with each & each with all, in a common Chaos: that is, it must be without reality, therefore . . . not knowledge - Or there must be some ultimate Point of Reality, on which all else depends . . . which separates the Elements of Knowledge and prescribes to each its own Sphere of action in the System of Science.¹

This point is developed in the Scholium to the second thesis in the *Biographia*:

That the absurdity [of a cycle of equal truths without a common and central principle] does not so immediately strike us, that it does not seem . . . *unimaginable*, is owing to a surreptitious act of the imagination, which, instinctively and without our noticing the same, not only fills out the intervening spaces, and contemplates the *cycle* . . . as a continuous *circle* . . . giving to all collectively the unity of their common orbit; but likewise supplies by a sort of *subintelligitur* the one central power, which renders the movement harmonious and cyclical.²

Yet what is an error when an unconscious attribution to the ordinary objects of consciousness is the condition of knowledge when consciously

¹ N 4265 (1815) in K. Coburn ed. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* vol. iii (Princeton 1973). All translations from the Greek occurring in the notes are Coburn's.

² *BL* i, p. 267.

attributed to the self, to the "SUM or I AM" as the "absolute truth capable of communicating to other positions a certainty, which it has not itself borrowed".³ This adjustment, the founding move of Fichte's transcendental idealism, requires however that something more be borrowed, with all the appearance of another *subintelligitur*, to render that unity substantial.

If a man be asked how he *knows* that he is? he can only answer, *sum quia sum*. But if (the absoluteness of this certainty having been admitted) he be again asked how he, the individual person, came to be, then in relation to the ground of his *existence*, not to the ground of *knowledge* of that existence, he might reply, *sum quia deus est*, or still more philosophically, *sum quia in deo sum*.⁴

Imagination supplies the ground of knowledge in the "Sum", but the transition from cycle to circle (from fancy to imagination and from arbitrariness to freedom) is mediated by God in that, as the "result" of Chapter XIII explains, our imagination is equally the repetition, the remembrance and result, of the real, "the great eternal I AM". The requirement for this double descent, or what will later be limned as the combined descent and ascent of imagination, Coleridge thinks, is inescapable: theoretical and practical self-intuition is but a formal condition of the *possibility* of knowledge - the derivation of the being of the individual person must be such that the intuition may be performed, otherwise we would in some merely formal sense be able to "know" without knowing whether there is any knowledge (or *real* correspondence between truth and being) or not.⁵ Thus "the I itself even in its absolute Synthesis

³ *BL* i, p. 268.

⁴ *BL* i, p. 274.

⁵ D. S. Ferris, in his "Coleridge's Ventriloquy: The Abduction from the *Biographia*" (*Studies in Romanticism* 24, Spring 1985, 41-84) notes that "Coleridge's appropriation of Schelling's *System* transforms its more radical ground (the construction of a pure knowing devoid of any content) into a concern with an immediate perception of an object" (p. 49). Chapter XIII, then, is concerned with actualisation, "the passage of a figure of thought to the thought which grounds this figure" (p. 69). In Part II below I will discuss an important context for this move.

supposes an already perfected Intelligence as the ground of the possibility of its existing as it does exist".⁶

The question here is not so much that of the *formal* possibility of knowledge, but of the possibility for us of becoming the subject of philosophy. But scarcely had the *Biographia* left the presses than this commences to change. In 1818, referring to Schelling's *Einleitung zu seinem Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799), Coleridge detects three "fundamental errors":

1. The establishment of Polarity in the Absolute, - and 2. the confusion of Ideas, with Theorems on one^ε side, and <with> Anticipations on the other, so as to make one and the same at once self-evident and yet dependent on empirical Proof. - But these and all his other errors, together with all his failures are referable to the one *πρωτον ψευδος* - the making *Nature* absolute.⁷

The *proton pseudos* ("fundamental error") is pantheism not just as an ethically and politically unacceptable⁴ conclusion, as the deterministic consummation of system, but as a logical confusion which destroys the system from within. Schelling employs "two opposite Methods, *ανω και κάτω* [upwards and downwards], in the Genesis of Nature!", he confuses "the Plenitude" or supernature, that which is the uncreated or *το αγενετον*, the not yet being, with "Nature", *η γενεσις* - the coming into being. In doing so he confuses the types of argument (or narrative) appropriate to self-evident grounds with those appropriate to dependent consequences, the nonphenomenal as discrete from the phenomenal domains. Michael Vater in his introduction to Peter Heath's translation of the *System* of 1800 adverts to Schelling's deployment of two notions of system: the Fichtean transcendental idealism of the deduction proper, and a more comprehensive, "Spinozistic" philosophy of nature in the Foreword and Introduction which also looks toward ~~to~~ the "extra-systematic"

⁶ Marginal note to F. W. J. Schelling, *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* (1800) p. 486 quoted in *Biographia* vol. i, p. 276 n.

⁷ N 4449 (1818) *CN* vol. iii. The first two of these points are recorded in the Letter to Green, 30 September 1818, *CL* iv pp. 873-6.ⁱ⁷

resolution provided by the concluding philosophy of art. He notes that this state of affairs, not surprisingly, "introduces a degree of internal inconsistency".⁸ Moreover, while the discussion of aesthetic intuition is extra-systematic, an ambiguously non-philosophical compensation for transcendental philosophy's incapacity to conclude and unify itself, this intuition which unites freedom and necessity and so assuages contradiction also appears to consciousness as something beyond the powers of conscious production: "all appearance of freedom is removed. The intelligence will feel itself astonished and blessed by this union, will regard it, that is, in the light of a bounty freely granted by a higher nature, by whose aid the impossible has been made possible".⁹

This final section with its repetition of contradiction or discontinuity is in effect an outline of a transcendental logic which would relate Schelling's two concepts of system.¹⁰ An observation from 1825 is instructive in relation to Coleridge's later response to Schelling's dialectic:

The infinite tendency of the I to be for itself, or i.e. the inseparability of the *ΕΙΜΙ* ["I am"] from the *ΕΓΩ* ["I"], or rather the identity (for in self-position the I consists) of knowing and being in one and the same act - this constitutes the primary *Bound - the end - finem primarium* . . . What is expressed, delivered, must have been conceived. But Ideas are not conceived but contemplated. In order to apply the logical process to these spiritual intuitions, and to produce a mental *object* for the Understanding to reflect, we are compelled to decompose the truth into two contradictory positions, the first: affirming what the second denies. And yet the whole is mentally affirmed. Not that any actual Synthesis takes place . . .

Now . . . the I, is one and the same with the primary Bound . . . but what *Bound* is this? A bound that is no bound - that is a Bound by not bounding . . . Milton's line is no mere play of words, but by a curious felicity of accident expresses the unique Act, here referred to. In very truth the I

⁸ F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville 1978), p. 221.

⁹ *System*, p. xxii.

¹⁰ *System*, p. xxii.

Does at one bound high overleap all bounds - 11

What the "curious felicity of accident" bodies forth in the work of art, with whatever appearance of contingency and extraneousness, with whatever breaking of generic bounds, is the obscure coupling of the postulate of transcendental idealism with the Miltonic, theological schema. The note which details Schelling's *proton pseudos* proceeds to outline a dialectic which would respect the distinction between the phenomenal and non-phenomenal "Spheres" and so would bring them into genuinely productive relation as follows: Stasis, the origin and destination ("Heaven"); Apostasis, the fall from God ("Chaos"); Metastasis or *ΜΕΘΟΔΟΣ*, which latter Coleridge defines in *The Friend*¹² as a "path of Transit" ("D^o. impregnated [i.e. impregnated]"); and Anastasis, the rising, resurrecting or upward path ("The World", "the genesis of Light"). The two linked modes of derivation then comprise the direct but rather catastrophic descent from Heaven and the at least outwardly more serene worldly genesis. They are joined together by method, and something of what this now means may be inferred from a slightly earlier attempt to interpret the beginning of Genesis. At issue here is the crux found in the sixth, seventh and eighth verses concerning God's creation of the firmament ("= Heaven") by dividing the waters into those above and below, and what Kathleen Coburn calls in her notes to these passages "the dependent problem" of either an extraneous or an internal derivation of the celestial bodies in relation to the firmament. This time the sequence runs: I God; II Prothesis "Indistinction . . . transcendental Fluidity"; III Thesis, noumena, Darkness; and IV Antithesis, phenomena, Light.

Thus from Magnetism, Electricity, and their productive Synthesis . . . God *εκοσμησε το Χαος* [rendered the Chaos into cosmos], and the following Verses to the imbreathing of the *Soul* into Man relates the process as far as the appearances or human Perspective

¹¹ N 5288 (1825). The note is headed "*Imagination*". The quotation (actually "At one slight bound high overleap'd all bound") is from *Paradise Lost* iv, l. 181.

¹² *The Friend* 1818, *CW* 4, vol. iii, p. 151, "Essays on Method".

is concerned -. Hence the successive products are related in the order in which they would have been noticed by a human spectator . . . So that falsehood is no where to be found in this sublime Hymn . . . What does not belong to the Senses . . . is true *rationally* - what is obvious to the senses, is true relatively to the sensuous notices of Man as in a general Contemplation.¹³

Coleridge's method, essentially in this example a hermeneutic method, is a repetition of the division of the waters, or more correctly of the division between darkness and light, now in the form of that between the absolute and the relative. It is a question of assigning priority; thus the reflex of method, which is the method of the "result" of *Biographia* XIII, is God. In this context Schelling had confused departure with return, whereas what separates them is (i) a departure-point and goal which is itself static, unmoved, apart, without polarity, and (ii) the path of transit which supervenes upon the chaos, simultaneously uniting and separating. Remaining within Coleridge's Miltonic paradigm the prototype of this latter might be the bridge built by Sin and Death from Hell to the earthly paradise just before "the sacred influence/Of light appears" in the dawn,¹⁴ treated as a myth of insemination. According to Coleridge Schelling's error is lodged stubbornly in the detail of his argument, where he confuses syllogistic logic ("I consider Syllogistic Logic as essentially empirical in respect of its Preconcessi et Presuppositi") with transcendental logic - and in this connection he comments that "A very faulty *Syllogism* may be an excellent Guess, and a very rational ground for Belief".¹⁵ When Schelling posits "an

¹³ N 4418 (1818) *CN* vol. iii.

¹⁴ *Paradise Lost* ii, ll. 1024-35.

¹⁵ N 5282 (1825) *CN* iv. A version of the argument of this note occurs as an annotation to the *System* of 1800. For a succinct expression of the distinction between syllogistic and transcendental logic, or between the "canon" and the "criterion" or dialectic, see S. T. Coleridge, *Logic*, ed. J. R. de J. Jackson (London and Princeton 1981) pp. 247-8. It must be stressed, however, that for Coleridge transcendental logic or "the analysis of the understanding or discursive faculty" implies, as it did not for Kant whom he is otherwise following here, a transcendent grounding in God.

Identity self-compelled to dualize" his compromised dialectic with its empirical bias can end only in a non-progressive endless replication:

I can find nothing necessary but the . . . $1 = 1/2 + 1/2 = 1$, with an endless repetition which is absurd, yet not only because an endless beginningless Succession is absurd, and therefore the absurdity equally attaches to Schelling's $1 = 1/2 + 1/2$, $1/2 = 1/4 + 1/4$ &c &c - or an eternal act.¹⁶

The merits of this analysis might be expected to appear at the point at which Schelling must negotiate the "*path of Transit*" from theoretical to practical philosophy, from nature to culture and history, in advance of the definitive synthesis afforded in aesthetic intuition.

The philosophy of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* is activist - its celebration of freedom and activity requires the full political implications of that epithet - but it is so in a context in which no empirical intuition is adequate to that activity. Everything is set in motion or volatilised by self-activity, is struck by interpretive and productive power: "Transcendental philosophy . . . proceeds from no existent, but from a free act", consequently self-apprehension in intellectual intuition, being free, "cannot be demonstrated, but only demanded".¹⁷ But the self which is the object of this knowledge is also flawed by a constitutive disproportion between what it is and does, and what it can perceive, such that consciousness is trapped in a facticity which is its own making. The self is a monad which in striving to know itself determines (realises) itself, but what remains unknown is the act of determining or limiting, which thus appears only in the guise of brute fact, as if given or imposed from without. Each subsequent attempt to overcome the limit in which

¹⁶ N 4450 (1818) CN iii. Coleridge is again referring to the *Einleitung*.

¹⁷ *System*, p. 28.

the ideal activity "overleaps the boundary"¹⁸ by determining it, each consequent elaboration of the self and construction of the world, merely inscribes a further limit. The self is contradiction which, until it arrives at the aesthetic symbol, eludes its every effort at resolution in self-apprehension. No synthesis can persist because of the disproportion between the known and the knower. "From ordinary reality there are only two ways out - - poetry, which transports us into an ideal world, and philosophy, which makes the real world vanish before our eyes".¹⁹ A compulsive striving after unity is powered by the disequilibrium in which activity or genesis is concealed from itself by its own products and eludes representation, yielding only a blind and unconscious production of nature.

The farthest development of this nature, its arrival at the intuition of corporeal individuality, is "the synthetic point or pivot of theoretical and practical philosophy".²⁰ Here the system redoubles itself, reverses the progress toward organic particularism of natural production and begins generalising itself, striving toward the social and historical synthesis of world government. The transition to consciousness (from theoretical to practical philosophy) is effected by a self-determination - willing - which interrupts the sequence of necessary acts to initiate a second sequence and the subject-object relation. The difficulty of this turning about the pivot is that the concept of willing cannot arise from the type of unconscious production of which alone the self is yet capable but which it will be otherwise condemned endlessly to repeat. The concept must be introduced from outside the self in such a way that it will permit but not necessitate what must be a free determination, and to that end Schelling invokes a pre-established harmony in the form of an "indirect reciprocity". Like

¹⁸ *System*, p. 62.

¹⁹ *System*, p. 14.

²⁰ *System*, p. 171.

the philosophical intuition which repeats it on yet a higher level, the concept of willing must be introduced into the self by means of obligation, of a demand for the realisation of an object.²¹

Both this act of demanding and the response which may or may not follow from it have only a "negative condition", which has the form of a non-action or passivity through which the existence of other intelligences is posited by the self. This negation of activity is the basis of a "negative reciprocity" in which each of the intelligences refrains from determining the other, but in which each finds something negated in itself by virtue of its individual existence. Individuality is itself a negation of activity, a restriction. Self-consciousness presupposes a prior positioning of the self in relation to objects, a narrowing of options which is the condition of autonomy:

the continuance of consciousness is rendered necessary . . .
 . [by] a continuing influence urging us to become
 repeatedly oriented anew within the intellectual world; . . .
 . through the influence of a rational being, it is not
 unconscious, but conscious and free activity (which
 merely glimmers through via the medium of the objective
 world) that is reflected and becomes an object to us as
 free.²²

Thus "For the individual . . . other intelligences are, as it were, the eternal bearers of the universe, and together they constitute so many indestructible mirrors of the objective world".²³ But the emergence of this mirroring or unanimity is mediated by an object, one with peculiar properties. This object fissures the world of unconscious production by introducing into it something unprecedented, it "pushes reflection toward something beyond any object", by exhibiting "an invisible ideal resistance".²⁴ It does so because of a

²¹ *System*, p. 163.

²² *System*, p. 170.

²³ *System*, p. 174.

²⁴ *System*, p. 173.

disproportion between concept and object which do not, as hitherto in the natural object, exhaust each other for the self - rather the concept, being in excess of this first object, exhausts itself in a second, possible object. The relation between the two objects is that of a means to an end, and Schelling defines this purposive object as the artifact "in a broad sense of the term", as that which has an end outside itself. However, since the relation in question is primarily cognitive rather than practical the artifact just as appropriately could be called the sign. The concept peculiar to the artifact or sign is then "the concept of the concept" (of an end) and is determining: it "makes the blind direction of activity upon the object utterly impossible".²⁵ In the first instance, before anything is expressed or understood, the sign as such articulates a demand for significance, for interpretation. In that sense it already mirrors not the intersubjective world, but the intrasubjective striving or contradiction which the system can only posit, the bifurcation of original activity being "not further explicable" other than to say that the necessity of self-consciousness - the necessity of knowledge for the philosopher or ideologue - requires it.²⁶

Schelling's problem at this point is the derivation of the artifact, the usefulness to the system of which is that through it what cannot be derived, the concept of willing, is presupposed. The artifact is the real pivot about which the system turns and it is for this reason perpetually anterior to the conscious self, inviting an infinite regress, so that, not surprisingly, no such derivation is supplied. But what does occur in company with the passage of bodies into culture and history which will later be ratified by aesthetic intuition is the intersection of the deduction with an ideal epitome of the system as such. This is a utopian moment of unanimity and homogeneity, a uniform mirroring of the world and of each other which anticipates the condition to which the subject of the system -

²⁵ *System*, p. 173.

²⁶ *System*, pp. 44-5.

the subject which the system is - aspires. But the condition of this transition from the "positive" to the "negative harmony" and so from theoretical to practical philosophy and to historical narrative is the rather puzzling conjunction - in itself neither positive nor negative - of the individual but not historically, socially or sexually differentiated body with the underivable, in this sense non-systematic sign - an intervention *ab extra*.

This reversal at the system's mid-point, because it is the moment at which the unfolding of the system is reflected back toward its goal of aesthetic intuition, is at the furthest remove from aesthesis but is also its anticipation.²⁷ If the work of art can genuinely unite conscious and unconscious production for consciousness and can assuage the drivenness of the self this is because the trail has already been blazed in the opposite direction - but not continuously. Instead through it philosophical systematicity haemorrhages to infinity. The *System of Transcendental Idealism* is a system without intelligible beginning, conclusion (since the aesthetic intuition is extra-systematic), or middle. But it is, as Coleridge comes close to suggesting, systematically non-systematic.

The focus of the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of the *Biographia* is not the internal shortcomings of the *System* of 1800, however. It is the difficult question of the approach to philosophy, which in this case means to the philosophical intuition of the self, and it is bound up for the author of his literary life with a theory of the text and of reading.

²⁷ Schelling has already explained that the separation of activity as such in the concept or rule of production from its products which self-consciousness requires and which is accomplished in judgement (*Urteil*) also necessitates a medium between the rule and its product or instance. This intuition - not concept - is the schematism, the Kantian *schemata*, of which he observes that "the whole mechanism of language will rest upon it" (*System*, p. 137). The schema is accordingly rather utilitarian and prosaic, it is for concepts what the aesthetic symbol is for ideas, for which no conceptual representation is adequate.

A VERY LEARNED DEVIL

One is an artist at the cost of regarding that which all non-artists call "form" as content, as "the matter itself." To be sure, then one belongs to a topsy-turvy world: for henceforth content becomes something merely formal - our life included.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Hysteria may be fitly called mimosa, from its counterfeiting so many diseases, - even death itself.

S. T. C.

In a brief series of articles collected under the title of "On the Principles of Genial Criticism" (1814) Coleridge raises for the general reader the question of the possibility of a legitimate juridical discourse in relation to aesthetics. As he makes clear, this is but a special, if privileged, case of a problem pertaining to philosophical discourse in general which, unlike mathematics and geometry, lacks an axiomatic or intuitively necessary grounding. Philosophy, "the affectionate seeking after truth", comprises the search for grounds or for what Coleridge insists are the same thing, definitions. It must for this reason subscribe to a structure of anticipation, an heuristics or hermeneutics.

Philosophy . . . concludes with the definition: it is the result, the compendium, the remembrancer of all the preceding facts and inferences. Whenever, therefore, it appears at the front, it ought to be considered as a faint outline, which answers all its intended purposes, if only it circumscribe the subject, and direct the reader's anticipation toward the one road, on which he is to travel.¹

¹ S. T. Coleridge, "On the Principles of Genial Criticism", second essay, in J. Shawcross ed. *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford 1907) Vol. I, p. 223. Orsini describes it as "perhaps Coleridge's most serious attempt to set up an aesthetic", but observes that "it does not go very far". See G. N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism: A Study in the History of Philosophy* (Carbondale and Edwardsville; London and Amsterdam, 1969) p. 168.

The broadly Kantian hypothesis of "a sense, and a regulative principle" of universal application but of irregular manifestation or development ("which may indeed be stifled and latent in some, and be perverted and denaturalised in others"²) for this reason entails only a "*conditional* necessity" of an ethical nature: once apprehended its cultivation is enjoined as a duty for those who have entered the circle of prefiguration by presuming to judge. Such a presumption carries with it an implicit *quasi* contractual obligation to observe the regulations which alone make judgement possible³ (the most important of which is the acknowledgement of a regulative principle), to conserve the prefigurative symmetries and so not to produce a discourse which is self-destructive or self-cancelling, which violates itself at the point of its own utterance. As to anyone who presumes illicitly in this way, therefore,

we can answer him only by silence, or a courteous waiving of the subject. To tell a blind man, declaiming concerning light and colour, "you should wait till you have got eyes to see with," would indeed be telling the truth, but at the same time be acting a useless as well as an inhuman part.⁴

One prominent beneficiary of this courtesy toward the organico-discursively deficient who compromise legitimacy by the "promiscuous use" of terms is "a lady" who chanced to be in the company of the writer when he was "gazing on a cataract of great height, breadth, and impetuosity". He remarked to her "that it was, in the strictest sense of the word, a sublime object", and she

² "Principles", p. 227.

³ According to Coleridge the desynonymisation of terms such as "Agreeable, Beautiful, Picturesque, Grand, Sublime" is "a previous step of indispensable necessity to a writer, who would reason intelligibly, either to himself or to his readers, concerning the works of poetic genius, and the sources and the nature of the pleasure derived from them". "Principles", p. 226.

⁴ "Principles", p. 225.

replied, "Yes! and it is not only sublime, but beautiful and absolutely pretty."⁵ This feminine promiscuity and gratuitousness (since her association with the writer is purely "accidental"), given the sometimes implicit but nonetheless programmatic gendering of beauty and sublimity, extends confusingly enough to the confusion of genders and for that reason may cease to be identifiably feminine irrespective of its occurrence in a "masculine" or a "feminine" subject; may even inhibit the gender identification of subjects, including the self-identification of the subjects of aesthetic judgement and of philosophy. In the event, this anecdote appears to form but a passing note in the transition effected by this second of the three essays on critical principles between the anticipatory outline of a definition of poetry as the regulatory idea of the fine arts presented in the first, and the definitions, the desynonymisation - with other appropriate terminological adjustments and once again along Kantian lines - of properly aesthetic and merely sensuous pleasure advanced in the concluding essay.

Such a transition in the course of the argument from a rhetoric of description to one of ethical prescription - a turning point occurs with the attribution of the manifestation of an aesthetic common sense to "a given state of intellectual and moral culture"⁶ - permits the substitution for a philosophical development from anticipation to demonstration of a statement of the prefigurative character of such a development in the form of an obligation on the part of the reader⁷. Once having entered the aesthetic domain the terminological

⁵ "Principles", pp. 224-5. In a marginal note to Herder's *Kalligone* (CW 12, vol. ii, p. 1069) Coleridge stressed that "It is impossible, that the same Object should be sublime & beautiful at the same moment to the same Manind". Shawcross has convincingly completed the latter part of the sentence, the conclusion of which was missing, to read as follows: "tho' a beautiful Object may excite & be made the Symbol of an Idea that is truly [sublime]". See *Notes and Queries* Oct. 28, 1905, p. 341.

⁶ "Principles", p. 227.

⁷ The third essay of the "Principles" also contains what is, according to Shawcross, the first public reference to the as yet unpublished *magnum opus*, "a large volume on the LOGOS, or the communicative intelligence in nature and man,

hygiene of desynonymy is, by means of such a gesture of dismissal or exclusion, legitimised as the anticipation of philosophy. In the following year, 1815, Coleridge employed a more elaborate version of the same device, accompanied by some considerable arguments for its systematic use, in the composition of what was to become the first volume of the *Biographia Literaria*. What remains open to interrogation in the light of this strategy, however, is the point in this latter work at which the method, in [§]desynonymising _^imagination without the benefit of deductive legitimisation in order to give a content to the hypothesis of an aesthetic common sense, is called upon to underwrite the principle of its own operation and so to unify and to rationalise its own enterprise.

Coleridge's project of desynonymy is that of a discursive and dialogic, a social and collaborative unfolding of the intelligibility of the world in and through the unfolding of the auto-intelligibility of the self; of the progressive elaboration, refinement and extension of hermeneutic power and so of reason.

Thus instead of asking, Was *Schönheit* sey? I would enquire what schön properly meant - i.e. what men mean when they use the word *schön* in preference to any other epithet . . . And this, if I mistake not, is the true Socratic Method: assuredly that which best suits the Dialogue form, which only the analytic suits at any time, but this piece of analysis, i.e. desynonymisation, best of all - it so naturally arises out of conversation.⁸

together with, and as a preliminary to, a Commentary on the Gospel of St. John" in which "I have laboured to give real and adequate definitions of all the component faculties of our moral and intellectual being, exhibiting constructively the origin, development and destined functions of each." See J. Shawcross ed. *Biographia* vol. i, p. 230 and n. 27, p. 310.

⁸ From an undated Egerton MS. 1S pp. 99-100. See P. Hamilton, *Coleridge's Poetics* (Oxford 1983) pp. 73-81. Hamilton argues for the philosophical efficacy of desynonymy and by extension of (British, vernacular) "practical criticism" as opposed to (German, esoteric) deductive theorising. The sketch for the transcendental deduction in the *Biographia* in this reading becomes a failed trope of philosophical authority for which the "aesthetic" and ironic components of the "letter from a friend" (*pace* Wheeler, Mellor, Simpson *et al.*) are an inadequate substitute which merely compounds that failure.

The argument of *Biographia* XIII would secure the autonomy of the subject as the foundation of that unity and effect a transition beyond merely philosophical theorising to the unity of theory and practice in the aesthetic domain, preparatory to the exemplary encounter between a truly philosophical or genial criticism and the work of one destined to be the genuinely philosophical poet. It is here that Coleridge will seek a passage for thought between two equally unpalatable alternatives: one comprising "atheist" pantheism and its near relation materialism, both varieties of a philosophical "Jacobinism"; and the other amounting to almost equivalent theistic absolutism, a metaphysical *ancien régime* which would amount, for consciousness, to no more than an inverted or reflected pantheism.⁹

In the definition of imagination the dialectised pattern of repetition which embraces divine and human faculties would describe a synthesis of production and reproduction, activity and passivity, creation and reception. Desynonymy as method is placed at the service of synonymy, of the eventual auto-synonymy of terms, in a process of progressive clarification and adequation. The prime agency of auto-synonymy which makes possible the orderly deployment of method is imagination as "repetition in the finite mind of . . . the infinite I AM", of the initial identification of consciousness and being in a divine, a truly constitutive therefore adequate, self-consciousness. The system of the subject's representations is ordered and the autonomy of consciousness is affirmed via the postulation of an intuition in the secondary imagination of an unconscious unitary origin of that system. This is the primary imagination, operative at the level of perception, which produces the world as significant, as

⁹ See Coleridge's note, presented as a commentary on Synesius, to *BL* i, p.246 (the translations are from a note on the same page of this edition):

ΕΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝΤΑ [One and all] - (taken by itself) is *Spinozism*.

ΕΝ Δ' ΑΠΑΝΤΩΝ [One of all] - a mere *anima Mundi*.

ΕΝ ΤΕ ΠΡΟ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ [One before all] - is mechanical Theism

But unite all three, and the result is the theism of Saint Paul and Christianity.

subject to the forms and configurations of empirical experience, in particular that of the opposition of subject and object, but also those of sensible and intelligible, as well as of the Kantian categories.

The primary and secondary imaginations would each repeat, complete and engender the other, notionally functioning as the limits of a potentially infinite circulation and permutation of signifiers. However, the effect of this non-synthetic, non-dialectical alternation, as much dissipating as constitutive, is to make audible a certain dissonance at the level of the transcendental, and this alone would be sufficient to suggest the recourse to absolute philosophy, or in Coleridge's case to religion. The capacity of the secondary imagination to render the self whole, continuous and co-present depends upon the subordination of fancy by means of the interposition of the *Logos* as the miraculous and divinely pronounced organ of that completion.

The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will which we express by the word CHOICE.¹⁰

The recourse to the *Logos* aims precisely to circumscribe, although not entirely to undo, this emancipation of a mode of memory initially independent of, and we might add, anterior to the empirical will. As a play of fixities and definites furnished by the law of association, a mobility or manipulability which lends itself to unlimited aggregation and decomposition, this aspect of fancy is the precondition of the operation of empirical consciousness in the arbitrary combination and substitution of signifiers. Such liberty for Coleridge issues in caprice or arbitrariness, in a phantasmogoria unable to transmit or to reflect the lineaments of an autonomous, auto-reflective and self-engendering, productive agency. It therefore threatens such an agency with internal

¹⁰ *BL* i, p. 167.

interruption, with dissolution and death, and its prototype, in *Biographia* Chapter VI, is feminine hysteria.

Coleridge's anecdote of the young servant woman which is recounted at the conclusion of Chapter VI serves to effect a transition from a critique of Hartley's materialist associationism in the form of its *reductio ad absurdum*, to the analogical adumbration in the following chapter of the principal topic of the first volume of the *Biographia*, the preferred dialectical model of consciousness. It is presented as a case (like many of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* it is a case history illustrating cognitive and/or moral disorder) approximating to "Hartley's theory of the will". According to Coleridge, Hartley's materialist associationism amounts to the subjection of the operations of consciousness to the "principle of contemporaneity"; volition would be reduced to the status of an appearance produced in the final analysis by the random encounters of material particles, to the mechanical product of an incalculably large sequence of otherwise unmotivated physical events. As a consequence "our whole life would be divided between the despotism of outward impressions and that of senseless and passive memory . . . In practice it would indeed be mere lawlessness".¹¹ Crucially, any emancipation of ideas or representations from sensation by means of a capacity to recall or to revivify impressions, with the ensuing confusion between the jurisdictions of these two despots, would be as destructive to presence, and to the self-presence in which the operations of consciousness are to be grounded, as the "absolute delirium" which would result in default of such a capacity, in which the sequence of impressions could never define a "present" for want of a facility by means of which to effect a determination of absence.¹² The example concerns

¹¹ *BL* i, p. 64.

¹² *BL* i, p. 64.

A young woman of four or five and twenty, who could neither read nor write, [and who] was seized with a nervous fever; during which, according to the asseverations of all the priests and monks of the neighbourhood, she became *possessed*, and, as it appeared, by a very learned devil. She continued incessantly talking Latin, Greek and Hebrew, in very pompous tones and with most distinct enunciation. This possession was rendered more probable by the known fact that she was or had been an heretic ... Sheets full of her ravings were taken down from her own mouth, and were found to consist of sentences, coherent and intelligible each for itself, but with little or no connection with each other. Of the Hebrew, a small portion only could be traced to the Bible; the remainder seemed to be in the Rabbinical dialect. All trick or conspiracy was out of the question. Not only had the young woman ever been a harmless, simple creature; but she was evidently labouring under a nervous fever.¹³

Fortunately, her condition attracted the attention of a "young medical philosopher" who was able to contain her curious and troublesome speech within a reconstituted causal narrative, to "trace her past life step by step; for the patient herself was incapable of returning a rational answer."

He at length succeeded in discovering the place where her parents had lived: travelling thither, found *them* dead, but an uncle surviving; and from him learnt that the patient had been charitably taken by an old Protestant pastor at nine years old, and had remained with him some years, even till the old man's death. Of this pastor the uncle knew nothing, but that he was a very good man. With great difficulty, and after much search, . . . (he) discovered a niece of the pastor's who had lived with him as his house-keeper, and had inherited his effects. She remembered the girl; related, that her venerable uncle had been too indulgent, and could not bear to hear the girl scolded; that she was willing to have kept her, but that after her patron's death, the girl herself refused to stay.¹⁴

The young woman had then moved to the town in which "she had been resident for many years as a servant in different families".

In the narrative reconstituted by the physician - also young, for this is a romance of a kind - certain remarkable features colour the provenance of this incapacitated servant, this illiterate woman with her incessant talking in

¹³ *BL* i, p. 65.

¹⁴ *BL* i, pp. 65-6.

disconnected, polyglot sentences which say more and less than she has any right to know, who remains opaque to reason by virtue of being abstracted from the intersubjective circuit of complementarity which normatively fits questions to answers. After she is set adrift by the death of her natural parents her familial structure comprises a double relation between nieces and uncles, from which so-called natural daughters, sons and fathers, let alone mothers of any description, are henceforth absent, except as components of the families with whose service her wanderings are punctuated, but in which she does not truly participate. She has been precipitated into a dimension of syntactical and tropological variability without natural limit which will become associated by Chapter XIII with fancy, and her subsequent career provides in addition an anatomy, amongst other things, of metaphorico-metonymic conversion.

According to Freud's and Breuer's initial communication, hysterical conversion (symptom formation) may arise when a hyperaesthetic idea, a memory, is denied abreaction - the discharge of its affect - through either a motor reflex or incorporation via speech or narrative into a conductive web of association. The idea is accordingly maintained in a region normally inaccessible to consciousness and its investment by affect is thus preserved from "wearing away". It is then capable of contributing to the experience of "*absences*", the formation of a *condition seconde* or *double conscience*, a splitting of the mind wherein unconscious ideational complexes comprise an alternative psychical organisation to that of consciousness. The unrelieved excitation may then pass instead in hallucinatory fashion from the idea or memory into sensation, into a "somatic innervation", producing a symptom subject to both ideational and "symbolic" overdetermination, i.e. which may condense associations between ideas or verbal associations, produce "tricks" of language etc. The symptom or

abnormal expression is thus apparently divorced from the idea from which it derives.¹⁵

More schematically then, hysterical conversion comprises an interruption to the symmetry or transparency of expression, realisation or enactment to the idea which would otherwise be so translated. The signifier is rendered opaque, is emancipated from its "normal" metaphorical, substitutive relation to an ultimate signified in order to embark on a career in which successive metonymic associations seem to contaminate and to pervert an incomplete, an unrealised metaphoric drive; to substitute, in a manner not definitively metaphorical, for metaphorical completion. The resultant confusion of memory and sensation (and so of subject and object), and of metonymy and metaphor effects a loss or dispersal of presence. Hysterical (as opposed to narcissistic) identification results not in an apparent consolidation but in a fragmentation of identity.

Freud's subsequent discussion of hysterogenic psychic trauma¹⁶ extends this analysis with regard to the Oedipus complex and the relation to the law which authorises the dialectic of identifications by means of which consciousness perpetuates and reconstitutes itself, and to a scandal which threatens its appearance of propriety:¹⁷ the issue of hysterical "pithiatism", and specifically of the "*proton pseudos*" (here the "first or original lie"), the persistent characterisation of the scene of initiation as one of paternal seduction

¹⁵ See J. Breuer and S. Freud, "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication (1893)" in J. Breuer and S. Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* (New York 1975) pp. 3-17.

¹⁶ The following discussion refers in particular to the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis* (New York 1954) and draws on the arguments of Jacques Laplanche on the relation of this text to Freud's project in J. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* trans. J. Mehlman (Baltimore and London 1985).

¹⁷ See S. Freud, letter to Fleiss, 21st Sept. 1897 in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, p. 216, quoted in Laplanche, p. 32.

or assault. It refers to a mode of initiation which can result in a manifestation of memory as persecutory or catastrophic for the self rather than as liberating, conducive to well-being or autonomy, and thus speaks to the question of defense in general and to repression in particular. Specifically, it relates to the failure to discursively incorporate a memory trace because, for structural reasons, it concerns an event which precedes and which concerns the inauguration of the consciousness and the linguistic operations which would effect that assimilation. That is, Freud is here treating by means of the theorisation of hysteria *the question of a precedence of inscription in relation to significance*. (For Freud this is characteristic above all of sexuality, with its diphasic and amnesiac mode of development: it characterises the object of psychoanalysis *par excellence*, since it is for this reason that only sexuality is repressed.) Hysterogenesis occurs when the dormant memory trace is recalled associatively, when an event is thus constituted in some sense as its repetition or symbolisation. In such a circumstance neither episode is traumatic in itself; the memory becomes traumatic "posthumously", or after the event. Jean Laplanche observes that the "trauma is situated entirely in the play of 'deceit' producing a kind of seesaw effect between the two events".¹⁸

With the term *proton pseudos*, however, something other than an objective lie is being evoked; at stake is the transition from the subjective to a grounding - perhaps even to a transcendental - dimension: in any event a kind of objective lie inscribed in the facts . . . If hysterics lie, they are above all the first victims of a kind of lie or deception. Not that they have been lied to; it is rather as though there existed in the facts themselves a kind of fundamental duplicity for which we would propose the term *deceit* . . .¹⁹

Hysterical symbolisation, as already explained, involves an immediate passage of affect, a discharge or transitivity - a "posthumous primary

¹⁸ Laplanche, p. 41.

¹⁹ Laplanche, p. 34. The English word "deceit" translates Laplanche's "*fallace*".

process" - which is a violation of semiotic economy. It fails to maintain due distinctions between memory and experience, inside and outside, and so breaches the integrity and continuity of the self. The hysterical symbol is cognitively void but saturated to the point of excess by affect. If it can be said to represent anything for consciousness this could only be its own opacity, the impotence of that consciousness to comprehend or to integrate itself. What the opacity of the symptom serves to veil, however, is constituted as what may be described as a scene of inscription, ambiguously violent and seductive, in which consciousness is unable definitively to locate or recognise itself.

Freud presents the example of a young woman, "Emma", whose symptom was precipitated when, upon entering a shop, she perceived two assistants laughing, as she thought, at her clothes. Analysis was subsequently able to discover an antecedent scenario:

On two occasions, when she was a child of eight, she had gone into a shop to buy some sweets and the shopkeeper had grabbed at her genitals through her clothes. In spite of the first experience she had gone to the shop a second time, after which she had stayed away.

This earlier memory or fantasy, as Laplanche points out, is already divided; it already repeats itself, oscillating between paternal or proprietary violence and, since the child returns to the scene and so arguably solicits a repetition of the act, an element of filial seduction. No unitary scene is uncovered, then, but a condition in which anticipation and retrospection reflect each other, as do activity and passivity, in which it is impossible to determine which preceded the other, to what extent in this possibly fantasmatic recombination violence dissimulates itself as seduction and *vice versa*.²⁰

²⁰ Jerome Christensen, in his *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca and London 1981) notes of the episode from the *Biographia* which we have been discussing that

Although rational investigation shows that the girl's ravings are wholly mechanical, *we know* that the "will" and the "reason" are never entirely suspended - we know because Coleridge has told us so. Somewhere within, the

What the mortifying attention to the clothing in the later of these two scenes serves to veil is not the earlier penetration of the veil, the unwelcome exposure and possession of the genitals by another (which seems not to have taken place), but a dangerous permeability or transparency of the clothes, their ineffectuality in the case of a merging, under the proprietary and to this extent at least paternal gaze of the shopkeeper,²¹ of the contrary states of nudity and of being clothed.²² Moreover, this disturbing history remains somehow legible, not to the woman herself, to her consciousness, but to another angle of vision which is eventually occupied by the analyst who is able therefore to penetrate this second veil, to reconstruct a narrative and to father a theory - a theory, amongst other things, of femininity.

Thus, beyond the dilemmas of the early "seduction theory", over which Freud did not cease periodically to agonise, he was able to affirm a certain "fact" of seduction: that of the infant by its mother. In this way a problematic of transcendental derivation is avoided or postponed, and the reproduction of desire and significance is, at some cost, normalised. Freud's conclusion is confirmed by Laplanche:

woman desired to be possessed: she cannot be entirely guiltless because the activity of the learned machinery received its blessing somewhere in her mind. The converse implication is also true. The most willed, reasonable action of the woman or the physician is in some way conditioned and cannot be completely to his or her credit. Who can tell the rudder from the stream?

²¹ The shopkeeper embodies the law which oversees the exchange of objects and of desires, and in this sense is also in the place of the father.

²² It is for this reason that we must qualify Laplanche's gloss to Freud's observation that the clothes symbolise the assault, which refers to them as an "entirely extraneous element" (p. 41). As is often the case, Freud chooses examples which condense elements of presentation and analysis, which seem to interpret themselves and which the analyst can unveil or discover for the benefit of his readers. In this instance the example both exemplifies and appears to allegorise hysterical symbolisation.

In the final analysis the complete oedipal structure is *present from the beginning*, both "in itself" (in the objectivity of the familial configuration) but above all "in the other", outside the child. The path through which that entity "in itself" is appropriated passes initially through a confused and, in a sense, monstrous apprehension of the complex in a primordial other (theoretically, the mother).²³

The (non-hysterical) mother becomes the repository and conduit of paternal truth who transmits the monstrous confusions and bizarre precocity of Kleinian fantasy but also attenuates their violence; she mediates the relation to the paternal instance by means of an anticipation which inoculates the child against the advent of adult sexuality; she soothes its terrors, anaesthetises its suffering and promotes its pleasures. Principally, however, she makes possible an appropriation and subsequently a kind of dialectic rather than a cataclysm in that she ensures that what must be appropriated shall never have been lacking, especially if this is lack itself. What the theorist unveils is a confusion between the veiled and the unveiled which signifies, in which inscription occurs and recurs as a necessary point of transition between instantiations or episodes of law, intelligibility or presence, and in which femininity (in particular the alternation of filial and maternal roles) is deployed in the work of theoretical elaboration and incorporation to effect the containment and subordination of confusion.

In Coleridge's account the afflicted woman's situation is mediated solely by a surrogate or overtly metaphorical, but also transgressive and at the same time deficient paternal function. For, according to the old pastor's true niece, inheritor and servant (house-keeper), he treated the girl, another man's niece, too indulgently, too much as if she were in her natural being what she might almost have been by adoption, a favoured daughter, exempting her from reprimand and so to a significant extent from service. Upon the pastor's death she

²³ Laplanche, p. 45. See also pp. 46, 24, 33; Ch 2 n. 9 and n. 13.

refused to accept the new situation and, removing herself from the town, embarked on a sequence of further flights or absences, working as a servant in a series of different families in which she would remain, as is the way of servants, something of a foreign body, unfamiliar and unassimilable.

Having first applied to the woman's uncle, the young man now makes "anxious inquiries" of the pastor's niece, as a result of which "the solution of the phenomenon was soon obtained".

For it appeared, that it had been the old man's custom, for years, to walk up and down a passage of his house into which the kitchen door opened, and to read to himself with a loud voice, out of his favourite books. A considerable number of these were still in the niece's possession. She added, that he was a very learned man and a great Hebraist. Among the books were found a collection of rabbinical writings, together with several of the Greek and Latin Fathers; and the physician succeeded in identifying so many passages with those taken down at the young woman's bedside, that no doubt could remain in any rational mind concerning the true origin of the impressions made on her nervous system.²⁴

The pastor's custom is to give himself pleasure, to affect himself with the amplified sound of his own voice, and thus to draw close to himself even as he incarnates or revivifies the dead languages of the Fathers.²⁵ He plays at self-identity, at auto-synonymy, by means of his identification with the Fathers, of the self-translation in which he seems to become as his own Father. The prolongation which overtakes his voice as it echoes, resonating and reproducing itself in the passageway, is put to work in order to solicit this surplus of pleasure, but on the condition of the confinement of this process to the pleasurable constriction of the passage. He refrains from following where it in fact leads and entering the kitchen, that disvalued centre of feminine productivity

²⁴ *BL* i, p. 66.

²⁵ See *CN* ii, N 3231 where Coleridge characterises delusion in relation to belief in a "continuous <and ever continuable> *Consciousness*", which he disclaims, as "believing the echo of my own voice in an empty vault to be the substantial voice of its indwelling Spirit"

which sustains him, and also, it would seem, refrains from overtly acknowledging those who by his repeated performance of this ritual self-division become his legitimate or illegitimate inheritors, those who labour or who do not labour within, but who in any case cannot help but hear. It is in this liminal sense that the subject of possession is "charitably taken" almost incestuously by her not-quite- but now dead father.

The young man is able to discover the "true origin" in the old pastor thanks to his niece and legitimate heir, who dutifully conserves her inheritance without making use of it herself, instead making it available to be read by the young physician, so supplying material for his own quest for identification. He is able to initiate, beyond the old pastor's faithful but evidently culpable adherence to the law of the patriarchs, the new dispensation of the sovereignty of the rational or scientific mind, to the extent that he corrects and completes that which was prefigured therein. He conducts the rational exorcism, not of the young woman as such (we hear nothing of her fate), but of the minds of those who might otherwise have been susceptible to monkish superstition, and in doing so he also disposes of the claims, however ambiguous, to legitimate inspiration which the mythology of such possessions stigmatises by inversion, by the attribution to devils, but does not dispel. This is an inspiration, moreover, which Wordsworth had seemed to allow in the Preface to *Poems* (1815) when he observed that

Fancy, as she is an active, is also, under her own laws and in her own spirit, a creative faculty. In what manner Fancy ambitiously aims at a rivalry with Imagination . . . might be illustrated from the compositions of all eloquent writers, whether in prose or verse; and chiefly from those of our own Country.²⁶

The young doctor revises and overcomes - medicates - the consequences of the old man's indulgence, his failure in his duty of pastoral care

²⁶ W. Wordsworth, Preface to *Poems* (1815) in *Pr W* Vol. iii, p. 37.

which coincides with his reluctance to embody the law for the young woman taken into his charge. This reluctance correlates with the failure of his habit, at once ritual and recreation, to effect its completion in self-realisation, in real self-possession. His excessive indulgence toward the girl is finally inseparable from his self-indulgence, from his solitary pleasure and its solicitation of a feminine weakness and unserviceability, of a naive narcissism which is the illusion of a sterile self-sufficiency. From the perspective of modernity, of the present, the old man's play is somewhat primitive or infantile, appropriate to childhood or senescence but not to what Coleridge elsewhere calls the "moment of self-exposition" of each living thing, the revelatory and symbolic transparency of "form and figure" to the Idea or "indwelling power" in which that living thing is epitomised²⁷ in much the same way that man is himself the epitome and revelation of nature. The pastor becomes the physician's adoptive father to the extent that he is also the young man's adopted child, relegated to a cultural nonage whose simple if deficient goodness can only efface itself before the advent of its eventual flowering and consummation.

The young man, in short, is able to father himself upon the young woman as a legitimate participator in and contributor to the rational imperium because he can discern, beyond her lawless resistance, a paternal instance awaiting the completion which he can strive to supply.²⁸ Moreover he does so by virtue of this resistance which is at once so disturbing and so attractive. It appears that she empowers him to allay the anxieties which she herself had a

²⁷ Lecture 13, 1818 Lectures on European Literature, *CW* 5 ii, p. 223.

²⁸ Compare Lacan: "How convincing the process of remembering was with the first hysterics! But what is at issue in this remembering could not be known at the outset - one did not know that the desire of the hysteric was the desire of the father, to be sustained in his status. It was hardly surprising that, for the benefit of he who takes the place of the father, one remembered things right down to the dregs." J. Lacan, "Of the Network of Signifiers" (Seminar of 5 February 1964) in J-A. Miller ed. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* trans. A. Sheridan (New York and London 1978) pp. 49-50.

part in provoking and to set at rest the entire demonology and the unreason attendant upon her illicit prolongation and illegitimate reproduction of paternal prerogatives. This wayward vessel and labyrinthine passageway in whom the speech of the Fathers resonates senselessly, does not inherit legitimately and dumbly on behalf of another, but instead is situated almost as if she were the feminine counterpart of a "natural" son (her "very pompous tones and . . . most distinct enunciation"). She therefore raises the spectre of a feminine prodigality or plagiarism extending to prophecy, poesy or even scholarship, reviving the demon of popular and feminist protest, but is put into service despite herself and is made to undertake the labour of mediating the progress of rational auto-synonymy. Because as well as in spite of her disability she re-enters the circuit of hermeneutics, which is to say that of the exchange of feminine bodies as the unconscious vehicles of patriarchal significance.

This being the case there is no end to her serviceability, the fruits of which are gathered yet again by Coleridge, who concludes from "This authenticated case" that it is

even probable that all thoughts are in themselves imperishable; and that if the intelligent faculty should be rendered more comprehensive, it would require only a different and apportioned organisation, the body celestial instead of the body terrestrial, to bring before every human soul the collective experience of its whole past existence. And this, this, perchance, is the dread book of judgement in whose mysterious hieroglyphics every idle word is recorded!²⁹

Fancy is emancipated from spatio-temporal restrictions, i.e. both from the necessity of merely reflecting a nature such as might be the object of an empiricist materialism and necessitarianism (Hartley), *and* from a supernature comprising a congregation of rational wills whose incarnate (spatio-temporal) forms remain bound by an ethico-ontological causality to God. But it need not for Coleridge issue in an hysterical delirium. The preferred alternative to

²⁹ *BL* i, p. 66.

pantheism, to the ultimate identification of sensible and supersensible, is not their confusion and the consequent overthrow of hierarchies, but their dialectical, dynamic, and symbolic reaffirmation, partly by means of the paternal metaphor.

The "young medical philosopher", in whom the enlightened (masculine) reader is invited to join Coleridge in recognising a version of himself, becomes the instrument by means of which he fathers upon what has become the servant woman's labouring (spatially and temporally dispersed) terrestrial body the hypothesis of the desired unified and co-present celestial body. The patriarchal texts which are dismembered and improperly amalgamated during their obscure passage into the light of reason reinscribe that body to constitute "perchance, . . . the dread book of judgement", in which

it may be more possible that heaven and earth should pass away than that a single act, a single thought, should be loosened or lost from that living chain of causes, to all whose links, conscious or unconscious, the free will, our only absolute self, is co-extensive and co-present.³⁰

The servant woman's exemplary deficiency and the threat which she therefore represents to the spatio-temporal continuity of narratives in general and of genealogies in particular becomes, by virtue of a further judicious and no less exemplary hermeneutic violence, productive of the very thing which is lacking. What is first determined as her personal disintegration receives a supplementary determination as the negative presentation of a supersensible and unimpeachable integrity, a "true origin" in "our only absolute self". This self is at once bound by "that living chain of causes" and is in its freedom co-extensive with and co-present to it, the chain which binds itself, the slave and the enslaver of itself, therefore autonomous and "absolute". The emancipation of fancy from spatio-temporal restraints, while by no means in itself divine, serves our supersensible predestination and confers narrative consistency upon spatio-

³⁰ *BL* i, p. 66.

temporal phenomena. Sensible and supersensible, nature and supernature, are resolutely distinguished yet reciprocally related according to the polarity of positive and negative, of life and death.

Thus, as Coleridge remarks in his introduction to the anecdote, it can represent but an approximation to Hartley's theory, "because the will and reason are perhaps never wholly suspended". The object of this game of presence and absence, like those of the old pastor and of the young man for whom the woman's lack of reason simply confirms the universal sovereignty of the rational mind, is to affect the self with the sense of its continuous and undiminished presence. Coleridge supplies what is yet wanting in the project of scientific enlightenment and of rational legislation by making the servant woman's distress, her mute *non serviam*, into the occasion of an opening of the transcendental-transcendent field in which to anticipate the revelation of the beauty of legality, of the law and of judgement, and to exhibit the preconditions of that revelation.

But not now dare I longer discourse of this, waiting for a loftier mood, and a nobler subject, warned from within and from without, that it is a profanation to speak of these mysteries* *τοῖς μηδέποτε φαντασθῆσθαι ... μή καλή γενομένη.* - PLOTINUS.

**"To those to whose imagination it has never been presented, how beautiful is the countenance of justice and wisdom; and that neither the morning nor the evening star are so fair. For in order to direct the view aright, it behoves that the beholder should have made himself congenerous and similar to the object beheld. Never could the eye have beheld the sun, had not its own essence been soliform," (i.e. *pre-configured to light by a similarity of essence with that of light*) "neither can a soul not beautiful attain to an intuition of beauty." [Coleridge's note]³¹

Sublimity, the negative presentation whose indirection combines concealment with revelation and appropriation, provides Coleridge's refuge against the threat of profanation involved in speaking of "these mysteries",

³¹ *BL* i, pp. 114-5. Coleridge's note is a modified version of *Ennead* 1. vi. 4 and 9.

thematized here as that of an indiscriminate or promiscuous revelation which would be subject to contamination, to being improperly overheard and illicitly reproduced (the so-called theme of the "deficient multitude" - "From a popular philosophy and a philosophical populace, Good Sense deliver us!"³²). With the construction of congeneracy to be attained and the integrity of the circle of preconfiguration to be conserved, Coleridge constricts himself, binds himself to the law, drawing a veil between himself and divinity. This reticence and prophylaxis is at once effected and rewarded by the substitution of the Plotinian admonition for actual revelation, for admission to the sanctuary or possession of or by the transcendent body. Clothed now in the speech of the Fathers in order to defend against the ambivalent attractions of divine immanence, this self-effacement and submission yields to identification and thus to a resurrection of the Word. Coleridge's orphic romance concludes optimistically with the awakening, the return of beauty; but beauty transfigured or transferred, no longer worldly, wayward and ambivalent, no longer lawless and "feminine". Beauty is cured or corrected, appropriated to "the countenance of justice and wisdom", to law itself and to the seat of judgement, to universality and necessity.

³² S. T. Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, CW 6, p. 38. See also C. M. Wallace, *The Design of the Biographia Literaria*, (London 1983) p. 50.

A CHAIN OF FLOWERS: THE SOCIAL PROGRAMME OF IMAGINATION

The conclusion of *Biographia* Ch. VI anticipates that of Ch. XIII in that it strives to unite and to complete the efforts of pastor and doctor, of religion and of philosophy as theoretical reason or science; to establish and to exhibit the integrity and the legitimacy of the relation - the dialectic - which unites the old and the young man, despite time and mortality, across the body of the stricken woman, and so regulates the affairs of death and life. Projected onto history this dialectical figure becomes *pseudos* or mystery, the myth of a trans-historical conspiracy of masters, conserving and only surreptitiously transmitting an identical esoteric wisdom by means of careful periphrastic delineations of unspoken and (perhaps) ultimately unspeakable truths. As metaphysics, as the foundation for a literary theory and a practical criticism, it controls the definition of imagination in *Biographia* Ch. XIII. The law of this relation is that of congeneracy, which is at the same time that of a mode of auto-synonymy, of self-consciousness, which would struggle to keep feminine incontinence and indiscretion at bay, to qualify the emancipation of fancy.

The Plotinian injunction which supervenes upon this irruption of lawlessness and anarchy corresponds to "the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF ! (*E caelo descendit Γνωθι σεαυτόν*)" of *Biographia* Ch. XII, "the postulate of philosophy" which would be at once speculative and practical.¹ Both enjoin the (dialectical) unity of the sameness and difference of sensible and intelligible, law and example etc., in an adequate and achieved self-consciousness. Such an imperative of congeneracy is not, however, a law among others, an instance of a

¹ *BL* i, p. 252.

general legality or simple derivative from or manifestation of the supersensible order; nor is it, perhaps more plausibly, no more than the demand for a discipline directed toward the discovery of supersensible truths, a theoretical statement about spiritual heuristics; neither can it be reduced to an ethical correspondence of virtue to reward. The demand for the similarity or congruity of universal and particular, rule and example, is directed toward the precondition of legality and of reason as such. It is the demand or desire, hence the law, which precedes and inaugurates any general legality, any discursive regime, any theoretical or practical intelligibility, or any dialectical agon.

However, it can only be posited in relation to an equally primordial and equally derivative lawlessness. The desire for esemplasty, for an imaginative fulfilment, is propelled and animated by the impotence of self-restraint or self-limitation, of metaphorical contraction or abridgement, to forestall a contamination, emancipation or discharge which affects it no less from within than from without. Self-reproduction and self-translation remain reciprocally (non-dialectically) dependent upon the emancipation of an other, of alterity, as Schelling's *System* of 1800 demonstrated. The solemn but nonetheless somewhat risible procession of the old pastor repeatedly and, in a measure not susceptible to simple determination, obviously reversing and retracing itself, no less than the sometimes tortuous vicissitudes of Coleridge's own argument, repeats this solicitation and contestation.

It is with such a result that Coleridge now introduces a premonition of the dialectical model in the celebrated image of the water-insect. At this stage the emphasis falls upon the active which is also by implication the spontaneous character of mental processes, and upon the relegation of contemporaneity or what may be represented by "the more appropriate and philosophical term . . . of continuity" to the status of a limit and condition rather than the essence of mental functioning. Properly speaking, spatio-temporal relations pertain to "phænomena considered as material" and are to thought as gravity is to

locomotion, "a something to be counteracted, . . . which by its reaction aids the force that is exerted to resist it".

Let us consider what we do when we leap. We first resist the gravitating power by an act purely voluntary, and then by another act, voluntary in part, we yield to it in order to light on the spot which we had previously proposed to ourselves.²

Contemporaneity and materiality limit and constrain thought, but in order to empower it to act, to prepare the synthesis of activity and passivity, of sensible and supersensible, in which activity is completed in self-realisation and in the self-reproduction which becomes manifest in a genetic correspondence between intention and accomplishment. Thought maintains and reproduces itself via a participation which is necessary but, Coleridge will argue, non-essential; an adjunct - less than a silent partner, more like a servant rendered obedient and productive in proportion to the oppositional force to which it is subjected. Similarly, the water-insect successfully resists the tendency toward annihilation of the chaotically associative and fugitive stream of sensation, and so

wins its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary fulcrum for a further propulsion.³

Thought remembers, recognises and conserves itself thanks to the practice of economy, by limiting self-expenditure or incontinence. Activity freely and spontaneously emancipates itself from a substratum of sensation or of natural causality in the same way that the artist "eloids" himself from nature in order to return to her, to realise itself in the consummation of the relation between sensible and supersensible, in order to complete the narrative of its self-realisation.⁴ Activity withdraws or veils itself, so constructing an

² *BL* i, p. 124.

³ *BL* i, p. 124.

⁴ Lecture 13, 1818 Lectures on European Literature, *CW* 5 ii, p. 222.

interiority or subjectivity, but purchases through this renunciation the power by means of which it effects its return, translating itself from potentiality to actuality, producing and reproducing itself. The intellectual organism, by the grace of the "intermediate faculty" at once active and passive, conducts its triumphant progress between the apparent immediacy of uncontrollable sensation, the amnesiac throes, the spasms and the impure metaphoricometonymic conversions of terrestrial exertion and their ultimate termination in the awesome repose, the fearful paralysis and the guilty hyperconsciousness of celestial recollection. Between these complicit figurations of mortality and immortality, of the dissolution and of the consummation of consciousness, it *temporalises*; for "The act of consciousness is indeed identical with time considered in its essence. (I mean time *per se*, as contra-distinguished from our notion of time . . .)".⁵

This reflexive function is manifested in a certain indifference to ends and objects other than itself - genius differs from talent in that "its predominant end is always comprized in the means; and this is one of the many points which establish an analogy between genius and virtue".⁶ It withholds itself from temptation, from the twin temptations of frivolity or sensationalism and of a stoic instrumentalism (as it would also from utilitarianism). Like the geometer's cyclical line it is "at once undetermined and determined; undetermined through any point without, and determined through itself"⁷; it is autonomous, self-reproducing. To effect this restraint a division must be made between practical and genial pursuits, in Coleridge's social and political allegory between the disciplined labour of worldly professionalism and the fruits of

⁵ *BL* i, p. 73.

⁶ *BL* i, p. 128.

⁷ *BL* i, p. 142.

domestic retirement and tranquility. The exemplary profession here is that of the clergy, in which "every man of learning and genius . . . may cherish a rational hope of being able to unite the widest schemes of literary utility with the strictest performance of professional duties".⁸

The work of such a "transplanted . . . germ of civilization" consists not merely in the execution of professional duties narrowly conceived but in mediating between "the mansion of the rich landholder" and the inhabitants of "farm-house and cottage". He is "a nucleus around which . . . capabilities . . . may crystallize and brighten".⁹ This synthetic labour possesses yet a further utility, however, in that, in addition to winning the widespread recognition of the individual's surpassing (genial) powers which may be denied to the esoteric order of philosophical savants, its fruits may be transplanted to the other sphere in order to discipline the divagations of genius. Each dimension of this complete individual fertilises and propagates itself in the other.

At the same time division is made, oppositional force is applied, to limit feminine influence and mobility and so to constitute a sphere of purely masculine endeavour - for "it is as natural for the man to be out of the circle of his household during the day, as it is meritorious for the woman to remain for the most part within it".¹⁰ The perfection or the realisation of genius, according to Coleridge and with the singular and significant apparent exception in his experience of Wordsworth, is normally dependent upon the timely translation of the virility so attained back into the retirement of the domestic sphere, of which it takes possession by virtue of the self-possession and forceful demeanor which has been acquired in worldly strife.

⁸ *BL* vol. i, p. 129.

⁹ *BL* vol. i, p. 130.

¹⁰ *BL* vol. i, p. 131.

But why should I say *retire*? The habits of active life and daily intercourse with the stir of the world will tend to give you such self-command that the presence of your family will be no interruption. Nay, the social silence or undisturbing voices of a wife or sister will be like a restorative atmosphere or soft music which moulds a dream without becoming its object.¹¹

Daily intercourse with the stir of the world, transmitted by feminine social silence prepares and facilitates another, more private and, if conventionally objectless, for all that more essential intercourse, for

Then, when you retire into your study, in the books on your shelves you revisit so many venerable friends with whom you can converse. Your own spirit scarcely less free from personal anxieties than the great minds that in those books are still living for you! Even your writing desk with its blank paper and all its other implements will appear as a chain of flowers, capable of linking your feelings as well as thoughts to events and characters past and to come; not a chain of iron which binds you down to think of the future and the remote by recalling the claims and feelings of the peremptory present.¹²

The cleric, the efflorescence of whose virility consummates the restoration, the reversal supervening upon spatio-temporal dispersal, triumphantly combines the roles earlier assigned to the old pastor and the young doctor. He restores, resurrects and fathers himself, he allays his own anxiety even as he resurrects the "great minds", the fathers entombed in his library to establish a dialogue or complementarity, hence a narrative and a genealogy of similar masters, free of hysterical interruption. He initiates a fictional continuity, a pleasurable bondage emancipated from or forgetful of the severe claims of present deficiencies. Feminine interiority, no longer a source of disruption, is now the restorative passageway between complementary domains of masculine endeavour, between world and study, action and reflection, desynonymy and auto-synonymy. It attains to the tranquilised and tranquilising

¹¹ *BL* vol. i, pp. 128-9.

¹² *BL* vol. i, p. 128.

transparency of a medicated atmosphere and of a speech which approximates to silence, or to that pleasing compound of speech and silence which is music.

Auto-synonymy, hence the dialectic of consciousness in general, is inseparable from a practical determination even as it is called upon to determine the practical, from the fertilising irruption within it of the Word which must be conveyed intact as if from without. The desired clerisy would be married activists and Protestant cultural warriors rather than, like Catholic priests, celibate and hysterical fantasts; ambassadors and promulgators of a qualified social organicism rather than of a lifeless metaphysical despotism which can only impotently reflect an insurgent atheist materialism. Moreover, unlike the contrasted examples of Coleridge and Wordsworth, it would heed

the simple advice: be not *merely* a man of letters! Let literature be an honourable augmentation to your arms, but not constitute the coat or fill the escutcheon! . . . [Do not leave] the high road of honourable exertion only to deviate into a labyrinth . . .¹³

Feminine labour transports and transplants the fruits of honourable masculine exertion and self-restraint, but without this service literature risks degenerating into indulgence, effeminacy and incontinence, thence into servitude, mechanism and indigence; into something closely resembling the exercise of fancy.

'. . . Too early or immoderately employed, . . . [authorship] makes the head waste and the heart empty . . . he who sends away through the pen and the press every thought the moment it occurs to him, will in a short time have sent all away, and will become a mere journeyman of the printing office, a compositor.'

To which I may add from myself that what medical physiologists affirm of certain secretions applies equally to our thoughts; they too must be taken up again into the circulation, and be again and again re-secreted in order to ensure a healthful vigour, both to the mind and to its intellectual offspring.¹⁴

¹³ *BL* vol. i, p. 132.

¹⁴ *BL* vol. i, p. 133 n.

The productive masculine struggle of synthetic work, of imaginative self-construction and world creation, is dependent upon fancy's (and femininity's) facilitation of the interpenetration and reciprocal constitution of the transcendental and empirical domains. But this same dependence results in the perpetual renewal of authorial anxiety, in the involuntary return of the nightmare of the fragmented and uncontrollable textual body. Thus, as the argument progressively divests itself of its polemical empirical and material emphasis and also of elements of its explicitly figural mode of incorporation, as in its repetitions and development it re-interprets, refines and idealises itself, it is propelled increasingly in the direction of the logical and abstract schematic character of the ten Theses. It is also compelled to repeat a by now familiar gesture of aversion or ritual of prophylaxis by postulating, in addition to the law that there be postulated a pre-established harmony between law and example which institutes legality in general, a further prohibition, again pronounced or ventriloquised in the person of the spiritual father of the moment, Plotinus. The intuition of immediacy which inaugurates philosophy as *scientia scientiarum* is qualified by the injunction that

"it is not lawful to inquire from whence it sprang, as if it were a thing subject to place and motion, for it neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place; but it either appears to us or it does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us; preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle as the eye waits patiently for the rising sun.¹⁵

At the point at which it would be possible to elaborate, for example, a marriage of heaven and hell in the manner of Blake, a Nietzschean genealogy of morals or a Derridean meditation on the non-ethical opening of the ethical field, the insistence of that possibility prompts a defence. Inquiry into the genesis, the genealogy of the intuition of immediacy is prohibited in order to conserve the

¹⁵ *BL* vol. i, p. 241.

genre of revelation, to make a radical separation of presence and absence free of the contamination of discursive and systematic non-presence, to forestall the importation of grammatico-tropological impurities. In this way genealogies and narratives like genres and genders, can be preserved or constituted, rendered intact or continuous, only at the cost of their simultaneous interruption and violation.

Intuition of "the spiritual in man", of the supersensuous unity of the self, must "work without words" because it is the free and lawful recognition of the autonomy of the will, of its synthesis of freedom and law. In the case of geometry a discursive order may be elaborated and propagated by appropriating a correspondent outward intuition to each intellectual construction. Thus although, like philosophy, geometry commences from a practical idea, an intuition rather than a demonstrable proposition, it remains situated firmly within the purview of theoretical reason only, and so inseparable from a certain scene of instruction:

Socrates in Plato shows that an ignorant slave may be brought to understand and of himself to solve the most difficult geometrical problem. Socrates drew the figures for the slave in the sand.

To the original construction of the line, I can be compelled by a line drawn before me on the slate or on sand. The stroke thus drawn is indeed not the line itself, but only the image or picture of the line. It is not from it, that we first learn to know the line; but, on the contrary, we bring this stroke to the original line generated by the act of the imagination; otherwise we could not define it as without breadth or thickness. Still however this stroke is the sensuous image of the original or ideal line, and an efficient means to excite *every* imagination to the intuition of it.¹⁶

In such an employment of "Socratic Method" the image or picture is a stimulus and a means of compulsion. It mediates the relation of master and slave via the despotism of outward sense and the concurrent subjection of the self to a theoretical exigency, to a formalism which is independent of that self, a

¹⁶ *BL* vol. i, pp. 251, 250.

mechanism which cannot but infringe upon even as it solicits a more essential spontaneity. Therefore the life of the slave is but a half life at best, and there remains what appears to be almost an absolute difference between even the intelligent slave and the true master.

Such is the character of any discursive regime considered solely in its theoretical aspect, but this is an untenable state of affairs in relation to discourse in general, which cannot dispense with an extra-discursive ground if personal integrity and autonomy is to be secured, and if there is to be any hope of desynonymising imagination and fancy.

The connection of the parts and their logical dependencies may be seen and remembered; but the whole is groundless and hollow, unsustained by living contact, unaccompanied with any realizing intuition which exists by and in the act that affirms its existence, which is known because it is, and is because it is known.¹⁷

Autonomy, as the unity of theory and practice in the act of reflexive consciousness, is by definition self-realising, is *immediate* self-realisation. If philosophy is to be possible it must be performed, although it cannot be theoretically demonstrated or communicated in any form other than that of a demand. The postulate of philosophy has the character not of a theoretical axiom but of an ethical imperative rendered absolute, "heaven-descended", falling under the prohibition placed upon its narrative incorporation as other than a pure limit and in this guise as the agent of corporealisation, of the definition of corporeal limits, of *remembering* effected by means of forgetting as opposed to the *dismembering* of fancy or the "mechanical memory".

Autonomy is possible solely in relation to the peremptoriness of an ethical demand which requires to be recognised as absolute; it is solicited by that demand, rather than produced by a theoretical compulsion. Recognition implies not logical assent of a *de facto* state of affairs but *submission*, the constitution of

¹⁷ *BL* vol. i, p. 251.

a contractual relation through the renunciation of a certain liberty or emancipation which is deathly, anarchic, undirected and self-consuming in order to constitute or to reconstitute obligation, order and significance, an economy or a polity. In relation to the intuition of immediacy or to philosophical initiation there can, therefore, be no conventionally pedagogic scene of instruction, no conveyance or communication of a pre-existing content by apodictic or even ostensive means, no unidirectional transfer which, in supplying a lack, would engender a reciprocating and commensurate obligation. Rather, since philosophy in general, like Kantian ethics, must commence from an obligation which is original and unconditional (categorical), it is necessary to embark upon a distinct politics and pedagogy of the ineffable. Thus, for example, French atheism, materialism and Jacobinism cannot be refuted, rather than problematised as Coleridge has already attempted, nor can a contrary position be established, discursively: "Such men need discipline, not argument; they must be made better men before they can become wiser".¹⁸

Recognition is also identification, as the law of congeneracy maintains, but it is now possible to unfold with greater precision the mode of operation of that law. Autonomy, reflection and interiority are constituted through the internalisation of a demand or desire - the subject as such, as other than empirical or phenomenal, coalesces around that demand as the imputed subject-object *of* that desire. Or does not do so, depending on the presence or absence of the birth which follows this impregnation, of "The sense, the inward . . . the philosophic organ", the organ of immediate self-realisation or secondary imagination which, since the realisation of philosophy is poetry, is also the poetic organ. The transition from discursive to extra-discursive or transcendental domains is not to be accomplished, however, without the assistance of a certain hermeneutic and dialectical analogism:

¹⁸ *BL* vol. i, p. 71.

They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennæ yet to come. They know and feel, that the *potential* works *in* them, even as the *actual* works on them! ¹⁹

Philosophical initiation presupposes revelation rather than instruction, a discipline or ritual, and above all submission to an authority in obedience to which consciousness must withstand the trial of its own simulated extinction. The entire world of objects, all in which empirical consciousness is able to recognise itself, must be relinquished; the seeming solidity of that world which the subject-object relation sustains must be permitted to dissolve in the hope that the result will be clarification rather than confusion, that it will be rendered transparent to an antecedent purpose. The eclipse of common consciousness within a textual and corporeal labyrinth, the expunging of received significations, is to permit the tracing of a hieroglyph, a palimpsest subtending empirical experience gesturing beyond the limits of the life which is defined by spatio-temporal existence. The death of nothing less than self and world, conceived as an act of the self - a symbolic act, a sacrificial pantomime - would define the precinct of the sacred, make room for revelation, for the manifestation of a predestination. Death, like the sleep of the chrysalis, becomes but the obscure passageway serving to unite a past life and the life to come, the instrument of personal conservation and transfiguration, of future self-realisation. The non-phenomenal continuity effected by the unconscious synthetic labour of the supersensible self (of what will be identified as the primary imagination, the "master-currents below the surface") ensures that the absence

¹⁹ BL vol i, pp. 241-2.

of an organ, its negative presentation, merely serves to inscribe the promise of an organ to come.

Likewise,

the IMMEDIATE, which dwells in every man . . . becomes intelligible to no man by the ministry of mere words from without. The medium, by which spirits understand each other, is not the surrounding air; but the *freedom* which they possess in common, as the common ethereal element of their being, the tremulous reciprocations of which propagate themselves even to the inmost of the soul. Where the spirit of a man is not *filled* with the consciousness of freedom (were it only from its restlessness, as of one still struggling in bondage) all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself.²⁰

Members of the supersensible commonwealth recognise each other and themselves as more than objects of theoretical interest by virtue of a universal ethical dispensation which comprehends and orients theory. The freedom of each directly implies and presupposes that of all the others, and the demand to realise personal autonomy is indistinguishable from the imperative to recognise that of others. Each is an object of simultaneous revelation rather than of theoretical cognition, each would participate equally in a fraternal relation of immediate and self-propagating reciprocity, in the mutually transparent co-presence of celestial and homosocial incorporation. Again, the consciousness of freedom, of the possession of the requisite spiritual equipment which would repair the interruption or supply the lack in relation to spiritual intercourse among similar or congenerous participants, is initially evident even in the representation of its absence, in the workings of its potentiality in response to a demand or wish. The immediate in the self is initially constituted as a *power* by means of a determinate, non-contingent deficiency in the phenomenal and discursive completeness of the world in which the self would otherwise be but

²⁰ *BL* vol i, pp. 243-4.

one component among others, at length no more than an atom or a shadow borne along by the theoretical-empirical flux.

THE UNKNOWN READER

Biographia Ch. XII, before embarking on the quasi-Schellingian Theses, therefore attempts to frame the project of theoretical exposition as such, and it does so by means of an account of reading, beginning with a series of "requests and premonitions concerning the perusal or omission of the chapter that follows". A preliminary note defines the circumstances in which a reader ought to suspend judgement or disbelief, (i.e. the juridical exercise of the understanding, a term here employed approximately in the Kantian sense) - namely in cases where, for whatever reason, the reader's understanding is unable to saturate or exhaust the text: "*until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding*".¹ But this seems to prompt in Coleridge another resurgence of anxiety:

In lieu of the various requests which the anxiety of authorship addresses to the unknown reader, I advance but this one; that he will either pass over the following chapter altogether, or read the whole connectedly. The fairest part of the most beautiful body will appear deformed and monstrous, if dissevered from its place in the organic Whole. Nay, on delicate subjects, where a seemingly trifling difference of more or less may constitute a difference in *kind*, even the *faithful* display of the main and supporting ideas, if yet they are separated from the forms by which they are at once clothed and modified, may perchance present a skeleton indeed; but a skeleton to alarm and deter.²

An attempt to read the pivotal Chapter XIII is not only subject to the normal hermeneutic protocols but, as the latter part of the prescription suggests, it is not susceptible to being treated as a strictly theoretical exercise, as merely a consecutive exposition of ideas. Like the revelation of personal

¹ *BL* i, pp. 232-3.

² *BL* i, pp.233-4.

immediacy which is accomplished in the philosophic exercise of the secondary imagination, the desynonymy of imagination itself must have something of the character of a revelation, being required to manifest itself completely or not at all, unaffected by seemingly trifling but in fact crucial discursive differences of more or less, and not denuded of the modifying forms through which it is organised and enlivened. These forms which clothe and modify, as Coleridge's habitually careful choice of language indicates, are the work of the "shaping or modifying power", imagination,³ which is to suggest that imagination can be specified or brought into view only by means of its own exercise, according to the law of congeneracy, by its auto-affection in its perpetually recurrent striving for auto-synonymy. The imaginative deployment of figuration can be reduced to neither the illustration nor the ornament of theory: it comprises the indispensable and essential accident of theory, animating, informing and orienting it under the auspices of a distinct and superior power.⁴

Figuration as enlivening theory; life as the clothing of death - these formulae refer not to the direct cognitive burden of the figure, its signification and function in the discursive framework, but to the figural detour as such, in excess of that signification and function. They concern the normally almost imperceptible suspension of reference effected by the figure, such that imagination, "as soon as it is fixed upon one image, becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to

³ *BL* i, p. 293.

⁴ D. S. Ferris (p. 50) argues that Coleridge refers here to the clothes of demonstration, of a genuinely philosophic exposition (*darstellung*). However, the context suggests that philosophy and discourse as such are both skeletal and immodest or unclothed to the extent that they are infused by an unmodified aspiration toward theoretical demonstration: the more completely demonstrated or wholly connected the more skeletal and deathly. (See *BL* vol. i, p. 152, where the conviction that "all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of DEATH" is recorded.) The required clothing is that of readerly authentication in relation to which the skeleton, as a kind of Schellingian artifact to the second power, articulates the demand. As we shall see in Part II below, the figure is Burkean.

none, it is imagination".⁵ Figuration may suggest by analogy that which cannot be demonstrated nor defended theoretically in other than negative terms, for example the analogy of spiritual revelation with continuous organic processes of maturation. However, even more importantly, the detour or suspension it involves, the lack of fixity and determination which it manifests and the theoretical bafflement which it engenders for consciousness (the inability to judge and the anxiety - especially that of authorship - attendant on that unaccountable impotence) serve to inscribe the demand for completeness, organicity, and life, through which alone the philosophico-poetic organ is erected and signification in general at length is to be secured. Only because the skeleton serves an analogous function to the Schellingian artifact or sign by gesturing toward a possible object does it cease to alarm. Coleridge is moving toward a redefinition of texts and of reading which aims to reconcile revelation, as opposed to discursive demonstration, with reticence or a becoming as well as life-preserving *pudeur* (or *pseudos*).

The relation of discourse to the notionally extra-discursive domain of transcendentalism and of transcendence or divinity, the sacred or numinous, is mediated by the figure as the vehicle of the (imaginative) dissolution and redefinition of empirical consciousness. The reiterated demand to "work without words" presupposes the labour of figuration as the precondition of imaginative work, to effect the constitution of a "language of spirits (*sermo interior*)" of which "the language of words . . . is only the vehicle". Transcendental interiority and the collective, mutually affirming reciprocations of liberal and homosocial autonomy can only be constructed through the delinquency of exterior empiricity which becomes legible in the ^rab_Λerations or conversions of the figure. These in turn, so interpreted, regulated and domesticated - a process discussed at length

⁵ J. P. Collier's notes of Lecture 9 of the 1811-2 "Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton" in R. A. Foakes ed. *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature* vol. i, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* vol. 5, p. 359.

in the second volume of the *Biographia* - constitute the specificity of the aesthetic domain.

The interruption by the ventriloquised "letter from a friend" of the transcendental deduction of imagination which was supposed to have taken place in Chapter XIII conforms quite strictly to the mode of argumentation which we have traced above. A strategy which has been repeatedly foreshadowed must now be employed, precisely at the point at which, under the rubric of imagination, the question of mediation, of the nature and function of discourse, of the systematicity of the system and so of the rationality of reason is most at stake. It takes the form of the undeclared fiction of the mutually sustaining intercourse, especially if conducted beneath or through a prophylactic epistolary veil, of male companions or of versions or modalities of the masculine self.

Thus far had the work been transcribed for the press, when I received the following letter from a friend whose practical judgement I have had ample reason to estimate and revere, and whose taste and sensibility preclude all the excuses which my self-love might possibly have prompted me to set up in plea against the decision of advisers of equal good sense, but with less tact and feeling.⁶

The friend is the bearer of a "practical judgement" but no less a judgement on the behalf of taste and sensibility or feeling. Here, as elsewhere, Coleridge does not use the technical language of philosophy loosely. The judgement in question is essentially ethical, an instantiation of the moral law and for that reason an object of reverence. At the level of a seeming pragmatics it counsels against the indiscriminate revelation of the mysteries to those "*to whose unprepared minds your speculations on the esemplastic power would be utterly unintelligible*", and warns that even if read whole and connectedly the chapter would yet not be complete, in other words would risk appearing as deformed,

⁶ *BL* i, p. 300.

monstrous or disfigured, since "*I see clearly that you have done too much, and yet not enough*". As has been noted by David Ferris the judgement has the effect of interrupting a potentially distasteful self-love,⁷ a too pleasurable or too unmodified auto-affection which, like the error of the old pastor, is in need of a supplementary practical determination. The performance of the deduction would comprise an improper self-disclosure, a self-exposure which would invite or reveal contamination, in some measure a self-contamination inseparable from the process of self-construction, but one which would in any case compromise the distinction between genres, such as those of self and other, subject and object, as well as that between genders.

The letter comes to interrupt the author's pleasing himself, but only in his own best interest, to heal him and to assist in his self-completion. It comes punctually in response to a question in order to counsel temperance, warning against a too precipitate or premature indulgence, for which there can only be substituted submission to the law of congeneracy and the establishment of the circuit of preconfiguration in relation to which the public has been found wanting. Yet it is precisely in this respect that this homosocial idyll is not without its agonistic undercurrents. Heeding Coleridge's advice to readers at the beginning of Chapter XII the friend refrains entirely from a theoretical judgement on the phantom deduction, instead pleading incomprehension and unfamiliarity. He does, however, refer to what the effect would have been on his *understanding* (Coleridge's emphasis), were he to have attempted it: "*I should . . . have been in that state of mind, which . . . you have so ingeniously evolved as the antithesis to that in which a man is when he makes a bull. In your own words, I should have felt as if I had been standing on my head.*"⁸

⁷ Ferris, p. 71.

⁸ *BL* i, p. 301.

According to Coleridge's previous discussion, to make a bull consists of

bringing together two incompatible thoughts, with the sensation, but without the sense, of their connection. The psychological condition, or that which constitutes the possibility of this state, being such disproportionate vividness of two distant thoughts, as extinguishes or obscures the consciousness of the intermediate images or conceptions, or wholly abstracts the attention from them.⁹

The example chosen to illustrate such an error could scarcely have been more highly charged in the context of the programme of the first generation of romantics: "I was a fine child, but they changed me". The point hinges upon the distinction between the "I", the "*Ego contemplans*" or the concept of personal identity, and the concept expressed by the "me", the "*Ego contemplatus* . . . the visual image or object by which the mind represents to itself its past condition, or rather, its personal identity under the form in which it imagined itself previously to have existed". Coleridge explains that the bull comprises the suppression of the "interjacent notion, 'changed'", and with it of the incongruity of that concept with that of the "I" as the uninterrupted subsistence of personal identity. The error is facilitated

by the circumstance of the words 'I' and 'me', being sometimes equivalent, and sometimes having a distinct meaning; sometimes, namely, signifying the act of self-consciousness, sometimes the external image in and by which the mind represents that act to itself, the result and symbol of its individuality.¹⁰

The facility with which signifiers lend themselves to fanciful recombinations and so to confusion, and in particular the equivocation in ordinary language and common consciousness between the act of self-consciousness and its result concludes, as in the case of empiricism, in the

⁹ *BL* i, p. 72 n.

¹⁰ *BL* i, p. 72 n.

predominance of sensation over sense, and in the apparent dissolution of the temporal continuity and so the autonomy of the self.

The state of mind antithetical to that of having made a bull, its "direct contrary state", is that in which "you will have a distinct sense of the connection between two conceptions, without that sensation of such connection which is supplied by habit. The man feels as if he were standing on his head, though he cannot but see that he is truly standing on his feet". The production for distinct attention of intermediate conceptions uniting distant ideas (a case in point could be that already suggested by Coleridge, that of the transcendental and empirical selves), in that it may abstract attention by its disproportionate vividness from the distinction between those ideas, may again threaten to collapse that distinction and to confuse presentation with representation, this time possibly in the manner of pantheism. Coleridge has, however, already decided the issue in favour of a realism of which the justification is yet wanting. Theoretical demonstration, which of itself participates in pantheism and so in death¹¹, in that it exhibits a connection which is not felt, such as the unconscious constructive participation of the self in the world of objects, appears to contradict or even to annihilate the world of empirical experience and the subjectivity it supports. It would effect a preponderance of sense over sensation, a loss of feeling or anaesthesia, apart from the second order "painful sensation" of this dissociation of sense from feeling. The absence of a faculty or organ for the symbolic alignment of sense and sensation would threaten to transform the progress of the child into an education in a morbid aesthetic and ethical incapacity.

It is, therefore, in the role of man of feeling that the friend intervenes in the unfolding of the deduction. He does so as one confronted by the inversion of customary forms of thought in the mode of a Gothicised sublime, "not

¹¹ *BL* i, p. 152.

without a chilly sensation of terror", but a terror and a deprivation which is the prelude to and productive of vision.

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

If substance may be called that shadows seem'd,
For each seem'd either!

MILTON.¹²

In place of the unwritten deduction there is substituted a fictional description of a reading which, in the required theoretical sense, since theoretical judgement is suspended due to lack of comprehension, has not taken place. The friend's state of mind is strictly neither that of one who has made a bull nor of its antithesis. Rather the dissociation of sense from sensation common to those states, because it is not possible to determine whether a bull has been made or not, is combined with their confusion. The friend experiences something, a feeling, which can be described only by analogy with revelation, with the "first time" of actual philosophical initiation which would implicitly or potentially unite in itself the commencement and the conclusion of philosophical work.

¹² *BL* i, p. 301. As recently as 1814 Wordsworth had publically likened the presumed or anticipated totality of his poetic enterprise to the composite structure of a "gothic church". See his "Preface to the Edition of 1814" of *The Excursion*, *PrW* vol. iii, pp. 5-6.

Revealed in this "*sudden emergence*" are shapes, insignia, symbols, pictures, images and characters; the guardians and appurtenances, the frames and supporters of the altar - perhaps indistinguishable from the altar itself in as much as it frames, supports and guards the divinity which would comprise the theological concept of a termination of an otherwise interminable recession of appurtenances, additions and commentaries. The aesthetic analogon of revelation comprises an allegory of figuration which exhibits in its chiasmic reversals, its alternation between image and inscription, bathos and sublimity, the suspension of significance and comprehensibility effected by the figure in virtue of its primordially substitutive character. It offers the spectacle of what amounts to a semantic and semiotic catastrophe. Instead of systematic elaboration there is presented a distillation of the theoretical moment as structural necessity in relation to self-construction in the trope of the system as figure, as putative analogy of or metaphor for the undiscovered articulation of being.

The preparation for the result of Chapter XIII which is also the specifically aesthetic moment therefore takes the form of the representation of an agon between author and reader in which the failure of reading engenders the power to write. This is so to the extent that theoretical judgement is baffled or frustrated:

*Yet after all, I could not but repeat the lines which
you had quoted from a M.S. poem of your own in the
Friend, and applied to a work of Mr Wordsworth's though
with a few of the words altered:*

-----An orphic tale indeed,
A tale *obscure* of high and passionate thoughts
To a *strange* music chaunted! ¹³

The allegory of figuration comprises a presentation of language in the state of referring to nothing beyond itself, a representation of the conditions of representability, of the reflexively unstable ground of signification. As such it

¹³ BL i, p. 302.

would confer significance upon disfigurement, would put it to work. The friend enters into correspondence with the author as the last in the sequence of ventriloquised, impotent fathers in the first volume of the *Biographia* who contribute to the legitimisation of the claims of the self to autonomy. He repeats a version of the double-sided Plotinian injunction, referring firstly to the prematurity of the projected chapter which, not being reserved for "*its proper place*" in the author's "*announced treatise on the Logos*", plunges all that it would erect without delay or restraint, without definitive auto-exemplification, into senescence and skeletal ruination: "*you have been obliged to omit so many links from the necessity of compression, that what remains looks . . . like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower*".¹⁴ As already noted he also pleads, with respect to readerly deficiencies, the lack of congeneracy of "unprepared *minds*". That is, he performs "the true function of the Father which at bottom is to unite (and not to oppose) a desire to the Law".¹⁵ If, by binding himself to the law of the law, the law or desire which would govern the production of legality as such, the author undertakes to suppress what is thereby also given to be read as his fathering of his father, his authorship of the letter by means of the amnesiac detour of male friendship, it is to prepare the possibility of a further reversal, a further inscription of the retrospectivity of the paternal metaphor. This in turn is possible because the mouthpiece of the law is also a reader who takes upon himself or is induced to take upon himself the burden and the stigma at once of writing and of the avoidance of writing.

The friend refrains from theoretical judgement, suspends his disbelief, and so experiences the text in the aesthetic mode. It is given to him to

¹⁴ *BL* i, pp. 302-3.

¹⁵ J. Lacan, "La Subversion," *Ecrits* (Paris 1966) p. 824. Quoted in G. C. Spivak, "The Letter as Cutting Edge" *Yale French Studies* 55/56, 218-9.

enunciate the law but not to embark upon the anticipatory enactment in which personal autonomy must be realised.

Be assured, however, that I look forward anxiously to your great book on the CONSTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY which you have promised and announced: and that I will do my best to understand it. Only I will not promise to descend into the dark cave of Trophonius with you, there to rub my own eyes in order to make the sparks and figured flashes which I am required to see.¹⁶

Practical or ethical efficacy is represented here by the promise, by binding oneself to one's own word, the pledge which would by anticipation link representation to realisation and so would render time and the self continuous. While the author promises to realise the task of philosophy, his correspondent undertakes only to recommence his deferred theoretical engagement with the deduction, specifically abstaining from promising by anticipatory enactment to fulfill that which is required of him. Although he has suspended theoretical judgement and in doing so has made room for the annunciation of the law, has liberated the voice of conscience by silencing the clamourings of mere speculation, the friend remains confined by the theoretical perspective, by the understanding, in relation to which any such realisation would be transgressive, an abrogation of theoretical probity bordering on solipsistic delusion, or mystical hysteria. He specifically recoils from the auto-affection, the illicit but no less required self-stimulation which it is, after all, his place in the development of the argument to interrupt. His is the readerly (theoretical) refusal to expose himself to the perils of writing.

The friendly letter comes as the vehicle of a representation of the disfigurement inseparable from the constitution of authority, but as a representation of a particular kind. The paralysis by deferment or disengagement of the friend's theoretical and practical capacities which is associated with the aesthetic mode of reception here fits him for a role indispensable to the

¹⁶ BL i, p. 302.

constitution of authority. The friend is notionally exempted from the vicissitudes of authorship, for although he writes he does so as if from a position of readerly incapacity; he in effect writes without writing, without initiating anything, as if merely representing. In contrast, the inscription of authority has the character of a spectacle as fascinating and seductive as it is terrible. The intervention of the friend is instrumental in encoding the process of inscription in terms of the aesthetic mode of the sublime and so representing it to the extent that the friend, enslaved or seduced by the spectacle, is also traversed by a writing which has the power to erase or suspend what may be, after all, merely the semblance of his practico-theoretical autonomy. The authority of ethical prescription ("KNOW THYSELF!") and the impotence of legislative presumption converge and to a degree are rationalised at this point. Reading is a dethroned or unrecognised sovereign (or alternatively a disabled father) in this scenario: it is the site at once of a constitutive practical determination and of its dissembling, of the submergence of the law's abstract, skeletal demarcations in the flesh of unreflected experience. Congeneracy, the trope of intersubjectivity according to the paradigm of male friendship, resolves itself into the promise of the congeneracy of representation as such, its preconfiguration for the purposes of expression, as the vehicle of an autonomous subjectivity and the medium of an adequate self-consciousness.

It remains true that the wholeness, connectedness and beauty of the congenerous textual body, the conformity of the text to organo-aesthetic canons and therefore its adequacy as expressive vehicle, can only be prescribed, anticipated or promised. However, this promissory construction of the claim to authorship makes possible the crediting in advance of the author with its performance, such that the attribution of the successful assumption of authority occurs as the reversion of a debt ever yet to be incurred, the debt of a submissive readership to authorship: *"All success attend you, for if hard thinking and hard*

reading are merits you have deserved it".¹⁷ In return for this advance on attainment, for entering and making possible the completion of the dialectical no less than hermeneutic circle of preconfiguration, the reader would seem to be spared the catastrophe of writing, the simultaneous perpetration and suffering of its inaugural violence, its illicit, ambivalent pleasures. Readerly fascination, the enjoyment of vicarious terror and the forgetfulness, the absorption in the vivid instantaneity of the spectacle or experience which that pleasure promotes would fit reading to contribute to the reflection, refinement and idealisation of authority.

However, this hierarchical apportionment of roles and privileges with respect to the reciprocal mirroring of writing and reading is by no means as benign as might at first appear. The subservience of reading within a movement of authorial self-appropriation deflects this dialectico-hermeneutic transitivity in such a way that the anxiety of authorship directed toward a promised or anticipated enactment is displaced onto the figure of the reader¹⁸ ("*Be assured . . . that I look forward anxiously to your great book. . .*"). The desired male counterpart is at once friend, rival and victim, the one for whom the orphic adventure is foreshadowed as autumnal, as the melancholy, non-progressive alternation of glimmer and gloom, or as reflection in the passive, deathlike

¹⁷ *BL* i, p. 304.

¹⁸ Deirdre Coleman has observed of *The Friend* of 1809-10 that Coleridge's anxiety to establish for himself a position of authority in relation to his readers resulted in a situation where they were "sometimes cajoled but more often bullied" by his projections of a hierarchy of readership based on affinity, or lack of it, with his own convictions. His much noticed emphasis on readerly activity being thus qualified, "an illiberal dynamic begins to emerge where an author can only ever be in the right" and his critical or unsubmitive readers in the wrong. See D. Coleman, *Coleridge and The Friend (1809-1810)* (Oxford 1988) pp. 50-3, and also pp. 60-1 for a discussion of the requirement of the reader to "suspend intellectual enquiry and surrender . . . to the mysterious twilight" of a constitutive "intermundium of obscurity". The argument of *Biographia* Ch. XIII suggests the extent to which these points may be viewed as concerning not only a rhetorical strategy but in addition a reading of an exigency of rhetoricity and of authorship as such.

mirror of dejection, who recoils from the risk of active emulation, from the descent to the mothers, in favour of the promise of authorial deliverance. The struggle inseparable from this coupling, this dizzying embrace whose effect is an overthrow or dejection, elicits a particular pleasure but simultaneously accomplishes the communication of a malaise and but the promise of a cure. The hysteriform confusion of inscription and representation which subtends discourse cannot but contaminate the representation of that confusion.

As for Schelling, the aesthetic representation anticipates and so substitutes, systematically, for systematic completion, for the regulated and authoritative passage between meaning, intention or being and signification. The otherwise inevitable degradation of this moment of mediation, due to the absence of a natural limit to the permutation and substitution of signifiers, into an infinite detour threatening to overflow all teleological horizons institutes a radical dependency, as was also the case for Kant, upon aesthetic experience. The seeming miracle or accident of the aesthetic representation, the apparently gratuitous image of self-completion (the beautiful) with its seemingly unearned dividend of pleasure or the incitement to the compensatory production of a negative image (the sublime), permits the attribution to the self of an analogous anterior and causative unity and autonomy. That which is aesthetic in the representation is above all its self-representative function, the apparent ability to order, limit and confer significance on itself, to appear to uplift and envelop itself in its own intelligibility and so to conduct an infinite and pleasing intercourse with itself - or the capacity to call forth the consciousness of such a function in its beholders. The representation frustrates theoretical comprehension in order to engender an infinite train of thought, to keep thought alive as *thinking*, and so to deflect awareness from product to process or act, from representation to being. In this dialectical no less than hermeneutic structuring of the aesthetic moment consciousness enters into the orbit of the representation, loses its way or succumbs to its incomprehensibility only in

order to find itself, to be brought home to itself by the unlooked for disappointment or the unaccountable (hence unsatisfactory, non-definitive) satisfaction of a desire.

This dialectic narrates the triumph of authority over reading and the restitution by means of which the authoritatively self-interpreting "I" assumes its legislative privilege, authorises or countersigns and so thereafter in this capacity accompanies and recognises itself in its own bequests: "The imagination then I consider . . . The primary imagination I hold . . . The secondary I consider . . ." The author inherits from himself the mantle of Socratic mastery - not indeed (or not yet) in the form of that which is exemplified by the controlled anamnesia of the geometry lesson, but that of the other, the Romantic Socrates, the ironist who was condemned by his fellow citizens, who was given to disrupting the illusion of his interlocutors' discursive self-possession and neatly paralysing their faculties in the snare of aporetic irresolution.¹⁹ Imagination is able to mediate between reason and sensation in that it reverts upon itself, affects itself in the interplay of its primary and secondary phases, and so is at once active and passive.²⁰ Whereas fancy unrestrained would divide and disperse personal integrity, would disorganise and disfigure the lineaments of autonomy, when pressed into service it would self-effacingly minister to the moral and cognitive

¹⁹ Some recent treatments of Romantic irony such as those found in K. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge 1980), A. K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge and London 1980) and, much more subtly and equivocally, in D. Simpson, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (London 1979), stress some form of anagnorisis - in Simpson's case this can take the form of a purposive critique and refusal of authoritative forms of discourse and the production in the reader of a critical self-awareness. It must be said that Coleridge (like Hegel) had severe reservations about such methods when permitted to escape aestheticising delimitations: see S. T. Coleridge, *The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. K. Coburn (London 1949) p. 137.

²⁰ Although neither primary nor secondary imagination is wholly passive or active since each is the product of a preceding sequence of syntheses, a distinction (more specifically an opposition) nevertheless obtains for each relative to the other, which makes possible their dialectical interrelation.

predestination of the self. Signification or representation unrelieved by an imaginative intercession capable of relating the components of the sign while preventing them from consuming each other, the simple semiotic model which Coleridge discerns in British empiricism and of which he also claims to find a variant in "French" rationalism - and later in Continental pantheism - is ultimately self-destroying, is unable to do otherwise than undermine its own claims to sustain a rational theoretical or political praxis. Aestheticisation interrupts this insupportable, self-cancelling state of affairs and in doing so fleshes out the all too schematic and deathly dialectical model.

In aesthetic experience the suspension of significance manifested in this same collapse *signifies*. Discourse is marked by an antecedent power, marked precisely in that which is in excess of its significance, in its ultimate opacity to meaning and its resistance to appropriation, whether in the form of a relative excess (beauty) or deficiency (sublimity), in an equally unaccountable solicitation or refusal, in so far as the two can be distinguished, of hermeneutic desire. The suspension of practical and theoretical engagement reflects a more original unity which again awaits expression or resurrection - it promises an organ and so authorises the thetic moment in anticipation of a discourse or theory symmetrical and subordinate to the living movement of creation.

However, it is evident that this compensatory fiction of aestheticisation is unable to do more than promise or give vent to a nostalgia for the resolution of theoretical and practical antinomies. Consciousness can only attempt to recognise itself in the moment of its own eclipse, can only endlessly repeat rituals of hygiene or of expiation in the attempt to constitute an aesthetic specificity which, if they are neither entirely futile nor ineffective, can never match realisation to intention. It can do little more than articulate the demand for fancy to be vomited forth from imagination as the prelude to the dream of its tasteful reabsorption, to exorcise from itself the spirits which sustain and

subvert the drive to self-realisation, or to deafen itself to the voices which deform and pervert the discourse of the master.

In the "result" where fancy and imagination are desynonymised the pivot is fancy, which mediates the relation between primary and secondary imaginations. It accomplishes an inferior, prosaic, comparatively disvalued intervention into notional imaginative wholeness. But the letter is in a sense a more original abridgement of the system than ~~the~~ this, a path of transit the transitional status of which is evident in that it substitutes for the deduction only long enough for the "result" to substitute for it. Again, the thirteenth chapter of the *Biographia* in its entirety is something of a pivot: the authenticating conjunction of empirical autobiography with the transcendental deduction in the mediating and reconciling concept of imagination was to have authorised the account of aesthetic reception, the composite "genial criticism", of the second volume. This would trace the operations of imagination and fancy in the constitution of the work. Criticism's relationship to literature would then resemble that proposed by Schelling of philosophy to the world - a "free recapitulation" or repetition.²¹ But the concept of imagination is no more the real pivot here than the synthesis of corporeal individuality was for Schelling in 1800. This is because what the comparison with Schelling suggests is a phantom "systematic" model for the *Biographia* in which aesthetic reception mirrors and is mirrored by aesthetic production, and in which literary criticism in more than the usual derivative fashion would be a form of self-consciousness. Those interpretations of the *Biographia* which stress the capacity of Romantic irony to effect a specifically readerly critical self-consciousness by means of the experience of hermeneutic resistance would then have to take their departure from an hiatus or interruption arising in an unrealised, deducted or abducted

²¹ *System*, p. 49.

"systematic" presentation in which the object of aesthetic and critical reception would not be the contents of the *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807 or of the *Poems* of 1815 but of the *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817. In this scenario the shadow of Wordsworth's genius would fall most particularly between the two volumes of the *Biographia*, where it would occupy a centrality, a pivotal position from which it had displaced Coleridge's own efforts. Readers who are familiar with aspects of the relationship between the two poets, particularly with such episodes as Wordsworth's unfortunate response to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and their effect upon Coleridge will appreciate the force of this hypothesis in relation to that biographical knowledge, but the systematic character of this substitution should not be ignored.²²

Wordsworth's verse is a letter from a friend, a letter which Coleridge sends himself from a friend who this time is endowed with practical power (since now the question for Coleridge is one of the empowerment of reading as criticism) but who is again unable to effect the complementary theoretical labour. Once more his function is to interrupt a dangerous because a too continuous derivation involving the prospect that in reading his own poems Coleridge might not only appear immodest by breaching codes of social decorum but might conclude by understanding his own ignorance, particularly his ignorance in relation to imagination, to the point of being no less ignorant of his

²² Jerome Christensen, who has examined the operation of subtle strategies of subversion and reversals of the attribution of authority between Coleridge's "life" and Wordsworth's genius (*Blessed Machine*, pp. 121-37), makes the following observation (p. 132):

A possible conclusion might be that Wordsworthian genius is Coleridge's figure, that Coleridge, for his own ends, fabricates Wordsworth the genius and exploits that figure within the analogical play of his literary life. Yet to have a figure normally requires the presumption of one who figures, of an intentionality somewhere, somehow recoverable; and once absolute genius . . . is subjected to the illegitimate freedom of the text, lost is the ground which permits the hypothesis of an integrity of mind that has its own ends . . . Wordsworthian genius may be a Coleridgean figure, but it is hardly Coleridge's figure.

understanding. As before the aesthetic is inseparable from *pseudos*, an intervention as if *ab extra*, to the extent that it dissimulates the primordial character of dissimulation (*proton pseudos*).

Nevertheless, Coleridge concludes the first volume of the *Biographia*, immediately after the desynonymisation of imagination and fancy with a gesture toward a restoration, one which appears a calculated assault on Wordsworth's aesthetic :

Whatever more than this, I shall think fit to declare concerning the powers and privileges of the imagination in the present work, will be found in the critical essay on the uses of the Supernatural in poetry and the principles that regulate its introduction: which the reader will find prefixed to the poem of **The Ancient Mariner**.

Before turning to the poem, however, it will prove useful to provide a context which will sharpen the issue concerning aesthesis as the notion is developed toward the end of the eighteenth century.

II

A Politics and an Aesthetics of Terror

THE GOD OF THE DEAD

Speaking and writing is a crazy state of affairs really; true conversation is just a game with words. It is amazing, the absurd error people make of imagining they are speaking for the sake of things; no-one knows the essential thing about language, that it is concerned only with itself . . . If it were only possible to make people understand that it is the same with language as it is with mathematical formulae - they constitute a world in itself - their play is self-sufficient, they express nothing but their own marvellous nature, and this is the very reason why they are so expressive, why they are the mirror to the strange play of relationships among things . . .

Novalis

primos in orbe deos fecit timor [fear made the first gods in the world].

Statius.

The epigraph from Thomas Burnet which Coleridge appended to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in 1815-6 recommends to the reader the occasional contemplation "in thought, as in a picture," of "the image of a greater and better world", that of invisible spiritual realities. However, it also warns that this mode of attention resembling that which might be addressed to a picture must be supplemented by a further vigilance "for truth", that only such a stereoscopy will enable us to "keep proportion, that we may distinguish certain things from uncertain, day from night". There is just no obviously authoritative procedure for effecting the transition to visibility, no code of instructions for painting an accurate portrait of what cannot be seen.

But who will tell us the families of all these [invisible beings]? And the ranks, affinities, differences and functions of each? What do they do? Where do they live? The human mind has ever circled after knowledge of these matters, but has never attained it.¹

¹ The passage from which the epigraph is taken is to be found in T. Burnet, *Archaeologiae Philosophicae sive Doctrina Antiqua De Rerum Originibus* Vol. 2 (London 1602?) p. 68. It is translated in full below, the text in brackets being

Should the eye of epistemological vigilance be closed or averted, the spectacle could all too easily degenerate into a chaotic chromaticism without proportion or depth. But to do its work of discrimination in relation to this confusion of ranks, affinities and differences which would also be the dissolution of invisible families, it requires a principle of selection.²

Chapters 5 to 9 will examine aspects of the work of this selective power, particularly with reference to narratives of historical continuity and

omitted or, in the case of a single word ("*utque*"[However or certainly]), modified by Coleridge:

I easily believe that there are more invisible than visible things in the universe. [And more orders of angels in heaven than there are fish in the sea.] But who will tell us the families of all these? And the ranks, affinities, differences and functions of each? What do they do? Where do they live? The human mind has ever circled after knowledge of these matters, but has never attained it. But [*utque*] I do not deny that it is good sometimes to contemplate in thought, as in a picture, the image of a greater and better world; otherwise the mind, habituated to the petty concerns of daily life, may contract itself excessively, and subside entirely into trivial thoughts. But meanwhile we must be vigilant for truth, and keep proportion, that we may distinguish certain things from uncertain, day from night.

² The phallic nature of this discerning eye is emphasised in Coleridge's sonnet "To William Godwin" of 1794-5, ll. 5-8, 13-4. Here the eye, which is not merely just but which makes Justice herself visible, selects between good and evil female principles by appearing to forcibly engender the former upon the latter - by starting a family - and giving much pleasure to the author (of the poem) and spectator (of the act) in the process:

Pleas'd I have marked OPPRESSION, terror-pale,
 Since, thro' the windings of her dark machine,
 Thy steady eye has shot its glances keen -
 And bade th' All-lovely 'scenes at distance hail'.

Bade the bright form of Justice meet my way -
 And told me that her name was HAPPINESS.

Since the eye is at once separating and generative it is linked to the creative Word; this is seeing in the optative mood, legislating the institution at once of true judgement and of visibility. To the extent that these lines recall *Paradise Lost* II, ll. 747-89 (Satan's engendering of Death upon his daughter Sin) Godwin figures here as a redeemed and redeeming Satan, a successfully self-authorising rebel.

continuity and upheaval. These chapters contribute to a politics of Coleridge's earliest attempts at a theory and a poetry of imagination.

I

The Lectures on Politics and Religion delivered in Bristol in 1795 were the real launching of Coleridge's public and literary career. After the ruin of his university degree, the attenuation of the project for a utopian "pantisocratic" settlement on the banks of the Susquehanna which had dwindled to the planned acquisition of a small farm in Wales, and his hopelessness of his attachment to Mary Evans, the lectures offered an opportunity to assume a public voice which would be bolstered by his ready wit and, on occasion, his considerable powers of personal fascination. William Hazlitt recalled his first experience of Coleridge's sermonising in 1798, when Hazlitt was aged seventeen:

Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text, "And he went up into the mountain to pray, HIMSELF, ALONE." As he gave out this text, his voice "rose like a steam of rich, distilled perfumes"; and when he came to the two last words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe . . . I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together.³

Coleridge's rising to his feet and the reported ascent of the mountain ("his text"), are twin ascents to solitary selfhood superimposed in a moment of powerfully eroticised identification and sublimation which, once begun, becomes swiftly all-enveloping, concentrated in the experience of the young man in the diffuse ascent of a voice which is nevertheless the vehicle of "loud", "deep", "distinct", penetrative words. Hazlitt's account reproduces a spiritualised sublimity as the rhetorical production of the experience of a supervening, unique power of the orator - "HIMSELF, ALONE" - over his auditors, of an epiphany at

³ W. Hazlitt: *Selected Writings* ed. R. Blythe (Harmondsworth 1987) pp. 45-6.

once climactic and unifying to the extent that the orator is constituted as its focus.⁴ The genre of the lecture involves personification, the presence of the lecturer's natural body supplementing the experience of a composite, diverse textual corpus. It is a staging of self-hood within a certain conventional framework of instruction, subordination and relevance. If this is what a Coleridge performance could be like, although for an impressionable teenager, then it suggests an interesting discrepancy with the content of many of the lectures.

In the fifth lecture Coleridge distinguished between the true disciple of Christianity and "the Philosopher invading the province of the Poet", whose mind being subject to "the Incrustation of favorite systems and learned Prejudices", "endeavoured to strike and dazzle by bold Fiction, and allegoric Personification".⁵ His example at this point was that of the Gnostics, the "first learned Christians", who traced the origin of evil to the intractability of a self-subsistent or unbegotten matter. The *cordon sanitaire* which was thus assumed between a recalcitrant materiality and the divine intelligence occasioned the derivation of gradations of intermediate intelligences by means of emanation, which is to say by copulatory contamination, with the result that "The genealogy or pedigrees of Intelligences male and female formed the greater part of their baseless system".⁶ Coleridge, employing a schema which is evidently already in place in his writings by 1795, then approvingly quotes St Paul's injunction to

⁴ Longinus, *On the Sublime* trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Cambridge 1907) I, 4, p. 43.

⁵ Lecture 5, *Lectures on Revealed Religion*, in S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion* L. Patton and P. Mann eds. (Princeton 1971)pp. 196-7. Much of this material was culled by Coleridge from the first volume of Priestley's *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ* (4 vols Birmingham 1786).

⁶ Lecture 5, p. 197.

"neither give heed to fables, and endless genealogies",⁷ and affirms as the base or ground of his own faith and discourse the self-subsistent and unbegotten nature of God, His identity with His own all-creative Intelligence, and the immediacy of its operations as creation or as inspiration.⁸

Coleridge's preferred model at the time of these lectures for the relation of God to human polity is that of an "original Contract" (of which the "original" was God Himself⁹) such as was represented by the Mosaic dispensation, the onerous gift which was also the mark of a process of divine selection. Moreover, the defense of the tenets of the Hebrew Commonwealth offered at this time doubles as a justification of revolutionary France and in particular of the necessity of acts "of national Rigour" which may be represented by its opponents as "bloody and tyrannical",¹⁰ and which find a precedent in the at times genocidal violence visited by the Hebrews on the Canaanites. This yoking together of Biblical and secularising utopian or revolutionary modes was aimed at confounding, in terms of their own rhetoric and objectives, "bigotted opponents to Religion" amongst his fellow political radicals, especially Thomas Holcroft and Godwin.¹¹

⁷ Lecture 5, p. 199.

⁸ Lecture 5, pp. 199-200.

⁹ Lecture 2, Lectures on Revealed Religion, p. 124.

¹⁰ Lecture 2, p. 123. This justification was of course far from unconditional. In *A Moral and Political Lecture* of February 1795 ("Lectures", p. 6, published in revised form that November as the first part of *Conciones ad Populum*) we find the following criticism:

The annals of the French Revolution have recorded in Letters of Blood, that the Knowledge of the Few cannot counteract the Ignorance of the Many; that the Light of Philosophy, when it is confined to a small Minority, points out the Possessors as the Victims, rather than the Illuminators, of the Multitude.

¹¹ See Lecture 2, p. 123n. A somewhat similar strategy, which was of course endemic to seventeenth century protestant revolutionism in England, was employed by Paine in his *The Rights of Man*. On the argument from origins in the

The most important principle of the Jewish Constitution was, according to Coleridge, "Liberty . . . proclaimed through the whole nation" which was "informed by divine authority that it was unlawful to acknowledge any human superior. Every Hebrew was thus the subject of God alone"¹², but to secure this first principle since "Property is Power and equal Property equal Power"¹³ provision also had to be made for the equalisation of property, with an act of grace for the abolition of debts passed every sixth year and a solemn Jubilee every fiftieth year for the restoration of all lands to their original owners with the acquitting of all encumbrances. In this way

Error while it was thus prevented from becoming subversive of the state, ceased likewise to be necessarily ruinous to the Individual. The fall from Plenty and Independence into Want & Servitude by the irresistible conviction which it carries with it, will generally make a man seriously repent him of the Evil of his Ways.¹⁴

controversy between Burke and Paine see S. Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: the French Revolution as Linguistic Event* (Hanover and London 1988) pp. 19-30. In early 1795 Coleridge's position combines features from those of Burke and of Paine. Paine's "original compact" between individuals, the society of God and man, is the logical termination of a linear sequence which, being more authoritative, voids the others, whereas Burke's "great primaeval contract of eternal society" is a transcendental principle, a persistent, immanent condition of sociality, the matrix of all individual social relations. Coleridge is engaged in defending the notion of a revolutionary attempt to realise an immanence somewhat of the Burkean kind, conceived more in "vertical" or metaphorical rather than linear terms, by collapsing, in a manner which would have been anathema to Burke, the textual and historical mediations which could be regarded as maintaining the hierarchical verticality (the *hypsos*, if you like) and so the intelligibility of metaphor.

¹² Lecture 2, p. 126. M. Lowman, in his *A Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews* (1740) p. 41, a possible source for this lecture, records that under Mosaic law "every Man should hold his Estate as a Free-hold in chief, immediately from God himself, as of his Crown, without any other Tenure of Service or Vassalage to any great Men whatsoever, as intermediate Lords". See p. 127n.

¹³ Lecture 2, p. 126.

¹⁴ Lecture 2, p. 126.

The inalienability of land provides a system of restitution capable of undoing a fall into error or evil by means of a periodic automatic reversion of affairs to their former state. Evil is a moment in the development of moral and religious consciousness which in this way can be consumed without material trace by that consciousness in repentance. Such a people would consequently no more than vibrate on the threshold of a secular history wedded to industrial and technological progressivism and to capitalist accumulation. It would in this way withhold itself from the taint of historical or narrative inscription. That this inalienability involves less a form of ownership than of participation by tenureship or trusteeship is made clear by "The most solemn Part of the Precept":

["]The Land shall not be sold, for the Land is mine, saith the Lord, and ye are strangers and sojourners with me.["] There is nothing more pernicious than the notion that any one possesses an absolute right to the Soil, which he appropriates - to the system of accumulation which flows from this supposed right we are indebted for nine-tenths of our Vices and Miseries. The Land is no-one's - the Produce belongs equally to all, who contribute their due proportion of Labour.¹⁵

The Jews did not attain to the complete abolition of individual property because they were "too ignorant a people, too deeply leavened with the Vices of Ægypt to be capable of so exalted a state of Society".¹⁶ Likewise they were constrained to dilute somewhat that equality in which they were what France was also in large measure to become, a nation under arms; while not maintaining a standing army and so reverting to a division of labour which, as in the case of "Commerce and Manufactures", would be conducive to the evils of accumulation, they adopted a system of "rapid Rotation" of eligible male subjects to and from the militia. This comprised at the same time a highly participatory

¹⁵ Lecture 2, p. 127. The quotation is adapted, with one omission (that of the words "for ever" after "sold"), from Leviticus XXV, 23.

¹⁶ Lecture 2, p. 128.

form of parliamentary representation with the militia serving both functions, although important questions were decided by the direct participation of all.¹⁷ Each eligible male, in the absence of those differentiations adduced by the arrogation of properties to individuals, was encompassed by a system of free substitution in which, subject to a few further qualifications arising from historical circumstance,¹⁸ in principle any could take the place of each.

The corollary of this arrangement, however, was that "there were no proper legislative powers lodged anywhere in the Constitution".¹⁹ Divine legislation is in principle complete and without qualification, although adapted to certain historical limitations of the Jewish people. These once removed the fraternal community would approximate to the perpetually immaculate vessel of a frictionless circulation and transposition, even to the point of simultaneity, of masculine identities, any of which would be capable of reflecting the totality of which it was a part²⁰ - in other words, it would approach to representing its invisible original and so to concluding at once the moral aberration of secular or

¹⁷ Lecture 2, pp. 129-30.

¹⁸ E.g. the establishment of priests and tithes. See Lecture 2, pp. 136-8.

¹⁹ Lecture 2, p. 130.

²⁰ Compare Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event* in *The Works* (New York 1975 reprint in 6 vols. of the 12 vol. edition London 1887) vol. iii, p. 297:

Every thing ought to be open; but not indifferently to every man. No rotation; no appointment by lot; no mode of election operating in the spirit of sortition or rotation, can be generally good in a government conversant in extensive projects. Because they have no tendency, direct or indirect, to select the man with a view to the duty, or to accommodate the one to the other, I do not hesitate to say, that the road to eminence and power, from obscure condition, ought not to be made too easy, nor a thing too much of course.

Burke was also of course a staunch defender of - particularly hereditary - property, "the ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth", the "characteristic essence" of which, "formed out of the combined principles of its acquisition and conservation, is to be *unequal*".

profane history. Thus for Coleridge's ideal citizen, "Regarding every event even as he that ordains it, evil vanishes from before him, and he views with naked eye the eternal form of universal beauty".²¹

Yet it remains true, then as now, that the naked eye must also be supplemented by the exercise of a constant vigilance as, for example, against the inroads of idolatry, "One of the chief and most influencing Principle[s]" of which was

a Persuasion that the temporal Blessings of Life, Health, Length of Days, fruitful Seasons, Victory in Wars, and such advantages were to be expected and sought for as the Gifts of some inferior & subordinate Beings, who were supposed to be the Guardians of Mortal Men.²²

Idolatry, at least in its worse cases in which "unnatural Lusts are made rites of Piety", "cannot be tolerated" as being "not consistent with the peace of Society"²³, therefore the "extirpating Spirit" of the Mosaic dispensation as exemplified by the massacres perpetrated against the Canaanites served to preserve that chosen society as predestined for the advent of Christianity. Coleridge's point in relation both to the history of the people who are the beneficiaries of this selection and, only a little more indirectly, to contemporary

²¹ "A Moral and Political Lecture" in S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures*, p. 13. Coleridge here speaks with the voice of Hartley's and Priestley's optimistic necessitarianism. N. Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford 1988) p. 215, points to the structure of anticipation which encloses this passage, in which "The emphasis is less on immediate fulfilment than aspiration". See also the claim in Lecture 1, p. 105 that "Reasoning strictly and with logical Accuracy I should deny the existence of any Evil, inasmuch as the end determines the nature of the means and I have been able to discover nothing of which the end is not good."

²² Lectures 2, pp. 140-1.

²³ Lecture 2, p. 143. Coleridge's examples of idolatrous practices range from ceremonial cross-dressing, "that men ought to stand before the Star of Venus in the flowered garments of Women, and Women were to put on the armour of men before the Star of Mars", to "Murder and the crime that cannot be named". Reference is also made to ritual prostitution and to the worship of "Jupiter the lustful Leader of the mythological Banditti, . . . Mercury a thief; Bacchus a Drunkard, and Venus a Harlot". See pp. 142-4.

radicalism, is succinctly put when he records that "I trust that in the course of these Lectures I shall be able to prove the final End so vast and benevolent as to justify any means that were necessary to it."²⁴

Pantisocracy was to have realised more nearly the human perfection foreshadowed in the Mosaic law by means of a comparable short-circuiting of historical process. It "was to have combined the innocence of the Patriarchal age with the knowledge and genuine refinements of European culture".²⁵ Whereas in later times Marx and Engels dared only to envisage a consecutive translation of complete, post-revolutionary individuals, those truly representative men, between distinct spheres of endeavour,²⁶ Southey with some humour anticipated its simultaneity - "When Coleridge and I are sawing down a tree we shall discuss metaphysics: criticise poetry when hunting a buffalo, and write sonnets whilst following a plough".²⁷ As is well known, the enterprise was founded on the abolition of individual property, or "aspheterization" ("I trust, you admire the word 'aspheterized' from a non, *spheteros* proprius! We really *wanted* such a word"),²⁸ in accordance with Coleridge's settled conviction that "The real source

²⁴ Lecture 2, p. 145.

²⁵ *The Friend* i p. 224; ii p. 146.

²⁶ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology (Part One)*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London 1977), p. 54.

... in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.

²⁷ Letter to H. W. Bedford, 22 August 1794, in K. Curry ed. *The New Letters of Robert Southey* i (2 vols, New York and London 1965) vol. i, p. 72.

²⁸ Letter to Southey, July 6th 1794. *CL* i, p. 63.

of inconstancy, depravity, & prostitution, is *Property*, which mixes with and poisons every thing good - & is beyond doubt the Origin of all Evil".²⁹

This doctrine acquired a polemically anti-Godwin inflection, however, in its insistence on a specifically affective bond. "The ardour of private Attachments makes Philanthropy a necessary *habit* of the Soul", which, proceeding by a strictly immaterial "*Concretion*", by assimilating other affections, progressively universalises itself.³⁰ Accordingly, the fate of Pantisocracy was linked to that of the relationship of its co-founders. Southey, whose radicalism was of a cooler, more Godwinian cast than Coleridge's, though not more steadfast (or perhaps not more reckless) for that, served in the role constructed for him by Coleridge and to be later ~~be~~ taken up by Wordsworth; that of friend, hero and rival if not also, at some level, of paramour.³¹ To these may also be added a certain paternal function, since he was called upon both to enforce his associate's commitment to Sara Fricker which, by Coleridge's own account,

²⁹ Letter to Thelwall, May 13th 1796, in *CL* i p. 296. See also Lecture 6, *Lectures on Revealed Religion*, p. 228: "While I possess anything exclusively mine, the selfish Passions will have full play, and our Hearts will never learn that great Truth that the good of the Whole etc. [is the good of each individual]".

³⁰ Letter to Southey, July 13th 1794, *CL* i p. 86. On this anti-Godwinian component see Roe, pp. 115-7. Although Roe does not say so, the sentiment is, in fact, somewhat Burkean: "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind" (Burke, *Reflections* p. 292).

³¹ Richard Holmes, for one, has speculated on a "sexual component to the friendship" of Coleridge with "the handsome, hawk-nosed, narcissistic Southey" who "had once paraded through Bristol in women's clothes". See R. Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London 1989) p. 64.

subsequently became genuine or spontaneous,³² and to forbid his sexual promiscuity, which probably means his recourse to prostitutes.³³

It had been determined as part of the emigration scheme that the three principal pantisocrats - Coleridge, Southey and Robert Lovell - were to marry three sisters, Sara, Edith and Mary Fricker (a fourth alliance, that of George Burnett and Martha Fricker was prevented by the young woman's refusal). Richard Holmes notes Coleridge's "general seduction of the whole [Fricker] family", although opining that "the real attraction, at least initially, was the mother, who treated him with 'maternal affection'. He longed to be considered one of her 'very children', but felt that he was physically too ugly for that".³⁴ It appears that the Fricker family functioned as a substitute for the Evans family, itself a surrogate home environment, as to some degree initially did Sara Fricker for Mary Evans. It is possible to glimpse Coleridge in a role resembling that of the German servant-girl of *Biographia* VI, one which was moreover to recur until the end of his life. The pantisocratic family, in its relative simultaneity and imperviousness to historical and hysterical deformation, would foreclose this possibility and to that extent would provide him with a stable identity, including, partly via the solemn contract of marriage, a reliable and satisfactory gender allocation.

Pantisocracy was to be secured by means of a participation by the men, at one remove and to the extent practically possible, in a common feminine,

³² See *CL* i, p. 164: "my addresses to Sara, which I first payed from Principle not Feeling, from Feeling & from Principle I renewed: and I met a reward more than proportionate to the greatness of the Effort".

³³ This practice may have had a great deal to do with the financial embarassments which helped to force Coleridge's departure from Cambridge in 1793. According to Godwin's notes of Coleridge's conversation in 1799 he had previously been "loose in sexual morality" and immediately before his enlistment in the army in December 1793 he had spent the night in a "house of ill-fame" (Bodleian MS Abinger C604/3, according to Holmes).

³⁴ Holmes, p. 41.

maternal substance. Still, a limit was set to the aspheterised transposability of masculine identities by the "sole proprietie" of monogamy, a precaution which, like the inalienability of land among the Hebrews, would retain a *quasi*-empirical grounding for those identities, which would help to preserve them from the threat of total aspheterisation. It is not surprising, therefore, that while the programme included some feminist tenets of no small significance (including universal adult suffrage and even an insistence by Coleridge that the men should do the washing "with a machine" and clean the house, which he estimated at "One Hour's addition to our daily Labour"³⁵), Thomas Poole should report of its proponents that "the regulations relating to the females strike them as the most difficult; whether the marriage contract shall be dissolved if agreeable to one or both parties, and many other circumstances, are not yet determined".³⁶

However, the largely Enlightenment utopianism of pantisocracy was soon to be overtaken both by events and by significant, in some measure corresponding, developments in Coleridge's thought. The failure of pantisocracy was succeeded by a profound reconsideration of the presuppositions of its brand of utopianism, in particular of its radical if qualified severance from historical process, from the genetic cycle of repression and return, and from place, from what might be regarded as certain irreducible or original features of emplacement, embodiment, or of finitude. As Nicholas Roe has suggested, no small part was owed in this to an engagement with the significance of the careers of two contrasted fellow political radicals, Godwin and Robespierre.³⁷

³⁵ Letter to Southey 21 October, 1794, *CL* i, p. 114-5.

³⁶ H. Sandford, *Thomas Poole and his Friends* (London 1888) i, p. 98.

³⁷ In his *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* Roe has documented in some detail the intertwining of Godwin and Robespierre in the texts of these authors as background to the emergence of Coleridge's concept of imagination. The

The latter was the practical man of politics who possessed, according to Coleridge, "a glowing ardor that still remembered the *end*, and a cool ferocity that never either overlooked, or scrupled, the *means*".³⁸ In Robespierre it is possible to discern the operation of a selective power joining reason to terror, with terror as the corollary of a process of rational selection or judgement. His principal defect, Coleridge would conclude, was haste, the precipitate commitment to immediate realisation of an imperious desire unmodified by other considerations. He was for that reason premature, violent and ultimately self-destructive. By contrast, the illuminism and perfectionism of Godwin's theoretical *Political Justice* of 1793, 1795 and 1798 envisaged a process of reform which was to be accomplished by means of the rational transformation of consciousness. It proposed a political programme which might attempt to negotiate the dangers of state terrorism of the left as had begun to be instanced in France and of the right as had threatened in Britain.³⁹ To this end it sought to disfranchise the emotions from participation in what was to be a process of dispassionate and deliberate enquiry. Coleridge believed it to be

a book which builds without a foundation, [and] proposes an end without establishing the means . . . Severe Moralist! that teaches us that filial Love is a Folly, Gratitude criminal, Marriage Injustice, and a promiscuous Intercourse of the Sexes our wisdom and our duty.⁴⁰

Anaesthetised to feeling, it devolves into a type of morbid speculative paralysis, lacking a principle or "foundation" capable of effecting its realisation,

discussion of the next few pages draws closely on Roe's argument, although to a somewhat different purpose.

³⁸ *Conciones ad Populum*, CW i, p. 35.

³⁹ This latter reached its zenith, if unhappily not its conclusion, shortly after with the officially tolerated rampages of "king and country" mobs and the treason trials of 1795, the year of Coleridge's early lectures.

⁴⁰ Lecture 3, *Lectures on Revealed Religion*, p. 164.

of bringing it to life. It dissipates itself, appropriately enough, in unselective promiscuity.

Godwin and Robespierre are thus confederate, fraternal, if superficially irreconcilable emanations of enlightenment rationalism, of the failure adequately to think means, mediation, the problematics of generation or creation in relation to its aims and products. Godwin, as a theoretician, is entirely caught up in the question of means, in the self-sufficient operations of a rationalist methodology which comes to dictate its own, for Coleridge often highly disturbing, ends. Godwin's subjectivist abstractions find their logical counterpart in Robespierre's relentlessly object-directed and misguided activism. In both cases potentially admirable ends are corrupted, perverted or denatured - and in Godwin's case this is more important than his lack of provision for their realisation - by an evident and systematic disproportion, either an excess or deficit, in the relation to their proposed means. The question which preoccupied Kant in the Third *Critique*, that of the possibility of an orderly and comprehensible transition between theoretical and practical domains, thus arises with considerable urgency in relation to rationalist and empiricist positions alike. If, as philosophers as diverse as Locke and Leibniz agree, the relation between a sign and its referent is entirely arbitrary or conventional how, especially after Hume, can this limit be crossed in practice except in a manner which is arbitrary and perhaps therefore also presumptuous or even violent?

Both Robespierre and Godwin, the active man and the man who refrains from action, are as complicitous with death as with each other, are implicitly or explicitly genocidal, murderous, terrorist, sterile. Together they represent an impasse for discursive reason, for rationalist no less than, as Coleridge will stress for his British readership in the first volume of the

Biographia, empiricist semiotics.⁴¹ But their very bracketing in such an analysis begins to suggest a possible solution, that of mediation, synthesis and co-ordination, the agency of a critical but affirmative stereoscopy; as the fruitful coupling and mutual moderation of selective precipitancy and of cognitive paralysis; as the product of the healing, revivifying and timely intercourse of its deathly, Enlightenment forefathers.

To develop the powers of the Creator is our proper employment - and to imitate creativeness by combination our most exalted and self-satisfying Delight. But we are progressive and must not rest content with present Blessings. Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination that stimulates to the attainment of *real* excellence by the contemplation of splendid Possibilities that still revivifies the dying motive within us, and fixing our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness still urges us up the ascent of Being, amusing the ruggedness of the road with the beauty and grandeur of the ever-widening Prospect. Such and so noble are the ends for which this restless faculty was given us . . .⁴²

We imitate or represent the invisible Creator not only in the contemplation of "splendid Possibilities" which we have represented to ourselves, but in that an inherent cognitive morbidity is combatted and complemented by a restless impulse to realisation which urges us up the endless gradations, which commits us to a mediation or genealogy, comprising the "ascent of Being". We imitate the Creator and draw nearer to Him when we strive to stimulate ourselves, revive ourselves, and satisfy ourselves in our own

⁴¹ The merits of Coleridge's focus on the question of mediation might be assessed in relation to noted eighteenth century texts in which rape or the threat of rape functions not only as a plot device, a theme amongst others, but as a means toward the figuration of the text itself, and of reading. The list would have to include works by Richardson, Fielding and, a more complex case, the Pope of "The Rape of the Lock", with reference to which particular attention would have to be given to the role of intermediate beings (the sylphs) and of allegorical personifications.

⁴² "Lecture on the Slave-Trade", *CW* 1, pp. 235-6. This lecture was delivered on 16th June 1795, the Lectures on Revealed Religion having occupied the period from the middle of May to early June of that year.

imitation of creation; above all when the endlessness of a pleasurable means becomes itself one of the ends for which we strive, when the antinomy of ends and means, like that of subject and object, is overcome; and when therefore the appetite of the fixed and transfixing eye becomes its own glittering object. We represent, select, sacrifice and resurrect ourselves ceaselessly, restlessly, and imitatively, in imagination.

By February 1798 Coleridge's "recantation",⁴³ a requiem for certain of his radical identities, is prepared to concede that, in the words of the Argument prefixed to the 1802 version of "France: An Ode",

those feelings and the grand *ideal* of Freedom which the mind attains by the contemplation of its individual nature, and of the sublime surrounding objects . . . do not

⁴³ The poem was first published in the *Morning Post* of 16th April 1798 as "The Recantation: an Ode" and was prompted by the invasion of Switzerland by French forces. An element of recantation concerning personified intermediaries which is noteworthy for our purposes is also present in work completed in relation to translations of Schiller dating from 1799 and 1800, and which represents an early *rapprochement* of English Romanticism with German romantic neo-classicism. In "The Visit of the Gods" the poet welcomes the Olympians to his "Terrestrial hall", and in a conclusion which recalls "Kubla Khan" we read:

Give him the nectar!
 Pour out for the poet,
 Hebe! pour free!
 Quicken his eyes with celestial dew,
 That Styx the detested no more may he view,
 And like one of us gods may conceit him to be!
 Thanks, Hebe! I quaff it! lo Paeon, I cry!
 The wine of the Immortals
 Forbids me to die!
 (II. 19-27)

Again, in the translation of *The Piccolomini*, II (iv) ll.110-13 and 119-22, a passage which Coleridge claimed owed little to Schiller, we find the following:

O never rudely will I blame his faith
 In the might of stars and angels! 'Tis not merely
 The human being's Pride that peoples space
 With life and mystical predominance;

 For fable is Love's world, his home, his birth-place;
 Delightedly dwells he 'mong fays and talismans,
 And spirits; and delightedly believes
 Divinities, being himself divine.

belong to men as a society, nor can possibly be either gratified or realised, under any form of human government; but belong to the individual man, so far as he is pure, and inflamed with the love and adoration of God in Nature.

The poem thus concludes:

O Liberty! . . .

Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,
 The guide of homeless winds, and playmate of the waves!
 And there I felt thee! - on that sea-cliff's verge,
 Whose pines, scarce travelled by the breeze above
 Had made one murmur with the distant surge!
 Yes, while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
 And shot my being through earth, sea, and air,
 Possessing all things with intensest love,
 O Liberty! my spirit felt thee there.
 (ll. 97-105)

Realisation is now, in the first instance at least, individual and subjective only, more aesthetic than practical or cognitive. It is an inflammation and expenditure of the self which, in the optimistic vein of the One Life theme, coincides with a boundless, an oceanic erotic possession - which is not less an auto-erotic self-possession. It also coincides with, even depends upon, the experience of an irrefragable limit ("verge"), beyond which the natural, masculine, poetic body dare not proceed if it is to conserve itself. Yet this limit permits what is therefore projected as a reciprocating embrace by the heretofore indifferent elements (ll. 1-4) in which the poet feels his own liberty and in which coupling is composed the recognisably poetic and prophetic voice. The poem presents a lucid statement of what would become Coleridge's characteristic dialectic of enabling limitation, of empowering disempowerment. However, between the very different affirmations of the lectures of 1795 and that of the Ode there falls the composition of the fragment, "The Wanderings of Cain", and of the first version of the "Ancient Mariner".

The thirteenth chapter of the *Biographia* had entertained the notion of a speculative deduction of imagination, and the "Ancient Mariner" covers similar ground, but in the form of the practical ethical and political problem of the

realisation of perhaps delusory utopian possibilities or intentions. The Gnostic theme of the implication of evil in the transition to particularity, to embodiment or expression now comes into its own. Why have revolutionary aspirations failed to be realised? The *Biographia* may be read as an apology which in effect commences by asking the different but related question "Why am I misunderstood?", then proceeds to "What is the relation between reading and writing?" and "How should one read?" In particular it asks "How should I be read so that, even where I may not be understood I might at least be credited with, and credit myself with, the possibility of an understanding and in particular a self-understanding?" The "Ancient Mariner" enquires into the conditions under which the problem of expression or realisation may be solved, or perhaps atoned for.

Wanderings of Cain

According to Coleridge,

The title and subject were suggested by myself, who likewise drew out the scheme and the contents for each of the three books or cantos, of which the work was to consist, and which, the reader is to be informed, was to have been finished in one night! My partner undertook the first canto: I the second: and which ever had *done first*, was to set about the third.⁴⁴

For the purposes of this inmixing of poetical labours Wordsworth was to have described the original act of murder, Coleridge was to have given an account of its ambiguous consequences, and the conduct of the concluding effort was to be determined by that of the writers, depending on whichever finished off his own object first. The attempt "broke up in a laugh: and the Ancient Mariner was written instead" as yet another failed attempt at sympoetry. The project, the residue of which requires this preface, takes place before an amorous but nonetheless competitive process of production can determine the outcome of its product, its *tertium aliquid*. It leaves Coleridge's fragment suspended.

⁴⁴ *PW* i, p. 286.

Almost thirty years have passed by; yet at this moment I cannot without something more than a smile moot the question of which of the two things was more impracticable, for a mind so eminently original to compose another man's thoughts and fancies, or for a taste so austerely pure and simple to imitate the Death of Abel?⁴⁵

Wordsworth is remembered as being disabled by his very originality, purity, simplicity and austerity from substituting for Coleridge and reflecting poetically on the death of Abel, on the first post-lapsarian crime, the original derivative which condenses the problem of historical origination. In this sphere, according to Coleridge, Wordsworth's very ability, his poetic pre-eminence, is disabling.

Methinks I see his grand and noble countenance as at the moment when having dispatched my own portion of the task at full finger-speed, I hastened to him with my manuscript - that look of humorous despondency fixed on his almost blank sheet of paper, and then its silent mock-piteous admission of failure struggling with the sense of the exceeding ridiculousness of the whole scheme.

The ridiculousness or absurdity here pertains to a dimension which is broached by the very form of the inquiry, in which by a curious alchemy attributes and values pass over into their opposites, and in which unprepared readers, including those readers whom we are disposed to recognise also as writers, might well feel as if they were standing on their heads. Consider for a moment the syntax of this passage which faintly superimposes Wordsworth's "grand and noble countenance" and "his almost blank sheet of paper" upon each other, so that the expression which is "fixed" on both becomes necessarily unfixed, the near blankness ridiculously reflecting and causing to reflect an almost oxymoronic silent admission of humorous despondency and mock-piteousness⁴⁶. Wordsworth's inability to write inscribes an ellipsis which

⁴⁵ *PW* i, p. 287.

⁴⁶ Wordsworth both looks fixedly at the almost blank sheet and, fleetingly or almost subliminally, his look, his demeanour, is fixed - represented or imitated

eloquently expresses a sense of the inability to write originally, purely and simply being already inscribed in what must therefore have always been the almost blankness of the sheet. Coleridge's own frequently implied relative deficiency in originality, purity, simplicity and austerity, terms as much ethically as aesthetically weighted, is here paradoxically empowering.

Nevertheless this is not thus far an orthodox dialectical reversal in which Coleridge would overcome the inherent limitations of Wordsworthian poetic authority by supplying what it lacks. He recalls that "years later"

I determined on commencing anew, and composing the whole in stanzas, and made some progress in realizing this intention, when adverse gales drove my bark off the 'Fortunate Isles' of the Muses: and then other and more momentous interests prompted a different voyage, to firmer anchorage and a securer port. I have in vain tried to recover the lines from the palimpsest of my memory . .

The recitation of "the birth, parentage and premature decease of the 'Wanderings of Cain, a poem'" is not to be regarded as any "excuse" for the publication of the fragment in its "primitive crudity". "I must be content . . . with assuring the friendly Reader, that the less he attributes its appearance to the Author's will, choice, or judgement, the nearer to the truth he will be." This is of course a familiar narrative to readers of "Kubla Khan": a work exists in some projected or potential form but its realisation is interrupted, an ellipsis is inscribed, by some accidental adverse circumstance which renders the sheet or

- there, as the almost blankness of the sheet answers and is answered by the almost self-cancelling expression of humorous despondency. Then, perhaps momentarily, it is unclear whether the following pronoun ("its silent mock-piteous admission") should refer to "that look" or to "his almost blank sheet". The readiness with which we ignore such aberrant readings and other comparable semantic phantoms is comparable to the assurance that would have been felt by many readers of "The Wanderings of Cain" that the Shape and its message are moral and religious aberrations, and that the third canto could not fail to unmask them as arrant deceptions or delusions - which might well have been the case. Coleridge, however, in the "Ancient Mariner", the *Biographia* and elsewhere went on to demonstrate that the implications of that message might require to be treated with considerable seriousness, although not always or only with seriousness.

some part of it almost blank, all but a remnant irrecoverable. This is suffered to appear by what ought not to be regarded as an act or judgement of the author; its becoming visible, like the unfortunate truncation which is in this way exhibited, is not his fault. In the hoped for adjudication of the well-instructed "friendly Reader", in the projected dialectical or hermeneutic moment, Coleridge would be attributed with the ability but absolved of the concomitant inability to write. Best of all, such a disability can even be recuperated as an expression of the author's moral superiority and ontological priority in relation to the text from which he has withdrawn.

The failure of the attempt to "begin anew" refers us, via the supplementary narrative of its production, to the argument of the fragment itself, which takes as its subject the "adverse" necessity of that production. It concerns what it would be tempting to describe as a modern conception of the particular, finite historical consciousness; of one who in the absence of Miltonic mythological or dogmatic assurance is subject, in accordance with the transcendental paradigm, to the vicissitudes and the radical uncertainties of ethical self-consciousness. In another respect, however, "The Wanderings of Cain" can be regarded as but an intermediate stage in the retreat from such an assurance. Milton, at least at a certain level of his argument, assumes as the basis of his narrative strategy the possibility of a simple reversal of the burden of justification, would "justify the wayes of God to men" in the light of a universal juridical reason indifferently human and divine, and therefore may invoke at the commencement of his work, however conventionally and ambiguously, one form of divine ventriloquism. Coleridge in the "Ancient Mariner" suspends this Miltonic interweaving of authority and experience. The motto of the "Rime" with regard to the predicament which it addresses might as well have been the lines from *Job* IV, 14-17 which in the eighteenth century gained some currency as an epitome of the sublime:

In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men,

Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake.

Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up:

It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image *was* before mine eyes, *there was* silence, and I heard a voice, *saying*,

Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?⁴⁷

The "Ancient Mariner" is not only a representation of an exercise of judgement in relation to assumed categories of good and evil, but is more particularly an examination of the nature and the derivation of those categories for a finite consciousness with a view to the possibility of such a judgement. In place of Milton's invocation of his "Heav'nly Muse" - Urania - and of the Holy Spirit, an enabling feminine and masculine coupling of no little interest, the epigraph to the "Ancient Mariner" provides the enjoinder "*ut certa ab incertis, diem a nocte, distinguamus*" (that we might distinguish certain things from uncertain, day from night - perhaps also masculine from feminine). What might easily be dismissed as poetic machinery or literary furniture and which notably includes the type of personification of intermediate or abstract beings against

⁴⁷ See *TT*, 28 May 1830:

The Book of Job is an Arab poem, antecedent to the Mosaic dispensation. It represents the mind of a good man not enlightened by an actual revelation, but seeking about for one. In no other book is the desire and necessity for a Mediator so intensely expressed. The personality of God, the I AM of the Hebrews, is most vividly impressed on the book, in opposition to pantheism.

The above verses are quoted, inaccurately, by Burke (*Enquiry*, p. 63), who argues that its "amazing" sublimity "is principally due to the terrible uncertainty of the thing described". The passage continues (verses 18-21, King James version):

Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly:

How much less *in* them who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation *is* the dust, *which* are crushed before the moth?

They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish forever without any regarding *it*.

Doth not their excellency *which is* in them go away? they die, even without wisdom.

which Wordsworth in particular rebelled becomes, like the associated literary machinery of epigraphs, arguments and glosses, a principal focus of the text.

"The Wanderings of Cain", by contrast, retains in the form in which we have it an approximation to a highly simplified version (because lacking for whatever reason the framing device of the invocation) of the Miltonic mode of notionally omniscient diegesis. The surviving fragment, the second or intermediate of the three projected cantos, broaches the possibility that the aftermath of the murder of Abel may upset the assumed bases for the canonical modes of deciding the distribution of guilt and punishment. It narrates a kind of repetition, in highly equivocal form, of the confrontation between the two brothers which presumably was to have occurred in the previous canto. But what apparently recurs here may involve no more than a double or impostor: Abel has not simply been removed by the crime, instead his status has become uncertain. "The Shape that was like Abel" demands an adjudication which would determine its intermediate character, its unstable blend of likeness and unlikeness. Is it or is it not an authentic expression or resurrection of Abel? It is intimated to be in all likelihood a mere shape or form, related to its original by resemblance and so in effect a metaphor, which would comprise, in this case at least, a purely formal, conventional or abstract relation.

In addition, there is the Shape's own support for the hypothesis that life and death are distinct, irreducibly independent domains to be considered. It claims that "The Lord is God of the living only, the dead have another God"⁴⁸, asserting an autonomous reality or originality for death, and so leaving no option for a resurrection which would take the form of a straightforward triumph of a higher form of life over death. Activity or expression, the production of a likeness or image, would fail to conform to a dialectical model of intact and lively translation. This being the case there would no longer be any death conceived as

⁴⁸ "The Wanderings of Cain", ll. 145-6.

the terminal moment which nonetheless co-operates with, shapes and defines life by the nullity which it opposes to it. The Shape, in that it presents an image of and a rationalisation for a life after death which yet would be sustained under the auspices of death (of the God of the Dead), challenges the reality of the accepted life/death distinction, and with it that between good and evil. By the same token it would permit no definitive interpretation of the act, no accomplished reference or symmetry between intention and attainment.

The main action of the Canto takes place in a barren landscape devastated by "the groan which Earth uttered when our first father fell",⁴⁹ an exhausted or evacuated Miltonic sublime which is personified in a ruined feminine nature. Here "The pointed and shattered summits of the ridges of the rocks made rude mimicry of human concerns, and seemed", in the absence of the archangel Raphael's authorised narration, "to prophesy mutely of things that then were not".⁵⁰ Here "the huge serpent often hissed . . . beneath the talons of the vulture, and the vulture screamed, his wings imprisoned within the coils of the serpent"⁵¹ in an interminably recurring, irresolvable agon not reducible to the definitive contours, the achieved significance of the act.

The Shape in some measure inevitably suggests poetry, the traditional *topos* of poesis as forming, informing, impregnating, dominating, and humanising - not least humanising the self. Personification would not amount to a mere dispensable ornament or at best an index of something more original such as passion, as Wordsworth appeared to suggest in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" of 1800. Rather such a shape would be the essential means of relating the self to itself, of becoming a self. But that would also require a judgement, a

49 "Cain", ll. 90-1.

50 "Cain", ll. 83-6.

51 "Cain", ll. 81-3.

determination which this Shape seems unable to sustain. It is difficult here to descry a clear and simple path from personification to person.

Nevertheless, in the absence of any feminine figure apart from Earth in the poem as we have it, there is a suggestion of a dialectic which would overleap the problematics of feminine participation, much as Coleridge had attempted in 1795 to minimise the encroachment of unattached or detachable women and of secular history on the Pantisocratic model. This dialectic would amount to a form of fantasmatic reproduction in which two men come together, more or less violently, in order to engender a third, much as Coleridge and Wordsworth were to have joined in the production of the poetic text. In *Biographia* XIII this tertiary position, the place of the true son or of capability, was to have reverted to the author. Here, in the person of Enos, there is an apparent utopian concept of inheritance as amnesiac rectification, as the renewal of innocence and of spiritual power. But to this point, midway in the poem as projected, there is not the same tendency as in the "Jewish constitution" and in Coleridgean pantisocracy to identify the regenerated with the progenitor, to annul history in metaphorical simultaneity. The reversion here takes the form of tender filial concern for a father's ruin. If Cain cannot be a true father, if his act bred only death and devastation in the repetition of a previous fall, then it can also be conceived in terms of a failed metaphor, as an impossible and self-defeating attempt on the part of Cain to substitute himself for Abel as the subject of an act of divinely authorised submission, to undo an already accomplished act of divine selection, and so to occupy the inferior position in the unbalanced metaphor of holiness which is constitutive of the world. Cain's crime could then be considered as perversely utopian, as an act of rebellious submission. Its relevance to "The Ancient Mariner" perhaps becomes clearer if metaphor in this context is considered in terms of naming or of legislation. The crime would then also be that of attempting to name or to rename and so to realise the self. Its failure is assimilated in the text to a rhetoric of belatedness, such that Cain is

situated where metaphors no longer work or are insubordinate in the manner suggested by the serpent/vulture image.

But there may yet be one to play the part of the true son who is also a true friend, in whom capability is wedded to submission. He may be by implication the innocent product and so the localised forgetting of the murderous coupling between his father and Abel, as the Shape may be the unsatisfactory remainder and reminder of that production, a possible version of Milton's Death ("The other shape/If shape it might be called that shape had none", the "execrable shape"⁵²). The Shape in this sense would be Enos' brother or counterpart, but the subtext may also be that the Shape is what is left over after Enos has been, in a manner of speaking, fathered upon Abel by Cain, much as Satan fathered Sin upon himself in a kind of spiritual or ethical self-murder before fathering Death upon her. Then it might also substitute for a largely excluded or unrepresented feminine presence, one of whose faces could be that of Milton's other "formidable shape", the "Snakie Sorceress"⁵³ who mediates between the antagonistic father and son. In "The Wanderings of Cain", however, it is Enos who performs this function by doing what his father could not and laying hold of the Shape, after which the three travel off together, led by the Shape who promises to become Cain's instructor - we would anticipate him to be a false instructor (although how would we tell?) - on the subject of the God of the dead. With the object of clarifying the role of these two possible phantom presences we will now turn to another pairing, this time of well-known studies in aesthetics and in politics from the writings of Edmund Burke.

⁵² *Paradise Lost* II, ll. 666-7, l. 681.

⁵³ *Paradise Lost* II, l. 649, l. 724.

THE FORCE OF UNION

In Edmund Burke Coleridge would at this time have found a superficially unsympathetic exponent of the values of history and of custom or usage. For Burke, culture took the form of a collective, normally unconscious intelligence, an antecedent of T. S. Eliot's "mind of Europe", an immanent order at once prescriptive and adaptable: "The individual is foolish; the multitude, for the moment, is foolish, when they act without deliberation; but the species is wise, and, when time is given to it, as a species it always acts right."¹ In the aesthetic doctrine alone of the celebrated controversialist there was much with which to disagree, and from which Coleridge's own trajectory would cause him to diverge even further. Burke poured scorn on the notion of an intrinsic connection between beauty and virtue (such ideas "rest . . . [the science of our duties] upon foundations altogether visionary and unsubstantial"²); he allowed a degree of materialist determinism in the form of a physical efficient cause of a spiritual or intellectual affection which seems absurd - e.g. that "the passion called love" could in some circumstances be "produced" by the relaxation of the body;³ and, crucially, he propounded the view that "the imagination is only the representative of the senses".⁴

In this latter instance he was merely echoing one form of an eighteenth century commonplace which found influential expression in the

¹ Burke, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), *Works* III, p. 86.

² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* J. T. Boulton ed. (Notre Dame and London 1968) p. 112.

³ *Enquiry*, p. 151.

⁴ *Enquiry*, p. 17, ("Introduction on Taste").

foundational role accorded to perception in the epistemologies of Locke and Condillac, and in the currency of an aesthetic which sought to parallel the operations of poetry and painting.⁵ Perhaps the furthest development of the elevation of the authority of experience is to be found in association with the rapid development and enhanced prestige - particularly in Dissenting circles - of experimental science at this time. The "scientific cult of unrhetorical speech"⁶ proposed an ideal of language as a precise mapping of the physical world, as a correspondence of words with things.⁷ In this connection the desire was frequently expressed that words should approximate to mathematical or algebraic symbols, that there should in this way be a minimisation of extraneous associations, equivocations, and metaphors. Associated with such an approach were a number of projects to further the development of a universal language,

⁵ Dryden was the author of an illuminating "Parallel of Poetry and Painting", published with his translation of Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* in 1695, which attempted to adapt a primarily literary aesthetic to the visual arts. This project was sustained by the priority which contemporary literary aesthetics already accorded to the visual, to the poetic image. For a discussion of this essay see D. T. Mace "Ut pictura poesis: Dryden, Poussin and the Parallel of Poetry and Painting in the Seventeenth Century" in J. D. Hunt ed. *Encounters: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts* (London 1971) pp. 58-81.

⁶ M. W. Croll and R. S. Crane, "Reviews of R. F. Jones' 'Science and English Prose Style in the Third Quarter of the Seventeenth Century'" p. 91, in S. E. Fish ed. *Seventeenth Century Prose: Modern Essays in Criticism* (London and New York 1971).

⁷ R. F. Jones in his "Science and Language in England of the Mid-Seventeenth Century" (Fish, p. 99) quotes the scientist and one of the founders of the Royal Society William Petty on his proposed "Dictionary of Sensible Words" (from the Marquis of Lansdowne ed. *Petty-Southwell Correspondence, 1676-1687* (London 1927) p. 324):

That Dictionary I have often mentioned was intended to translate all words used in Argument and Important matters into words that are *Signa Rerum* and *Motuum*. But the Treasury of *Sensata* are the many Miscellany papers of my scripture, which I add and subtract, compose and distribute as Printers do their Letters.

one at least of which was sponsored by that noted Restoration gambit, the Royal Society.⁸

Much of what Coleridge later attributed to imagination was regarded by Burke, whose Irish experience and sympathy for Catholics provided him with an alternative agenda, as the work of language.⁹ In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* of 1757 language in general and poetry in particular comprise an order of significance and of power distinct from and superior to that of the imagination, from all that is connected to sensation, the corporeal, and the pictorial. Burke thus effects a radical break with some of the dominant themes of early eighteenth century aesthetics.

I am of the opinion, that the most general effect . . . of . . . words, does not arise from their forming pictures of the several things they would represent in the imagination But . . . words operate . . . by having from use the same effect on being mentioned, that their original has when it is seen.¹⁰

Indeed so little does poetry depend for its effect on the power of raising sensible images, that I am convinced it would lose a very considerable part of its energy, if this were the necessary result of all description. Because that union of affecting words which is the most powerful of all poetical instruments, would frequently lose its force along with its propriety and consistency, if the sensible images were always excited.¹¹

Burke's examples in support of this latter proposition are *Aeneid* VIII, ll. 429-32, a sublime description of the incomplete formation of thunder under the hammers of the Cyclops, a process for which the corresponding

⁸ I.e. John Wilkin's *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* of 1668. See Jones, p. 103.

⁹ See Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford 1989), p. 64: "Burke seems to view language as in itself empowered, as if it has a power to the sublime independent of users, as if it has a substantiality uniquely its own".

¹⁰ *Enquiry*, p. 167.

¹¹ *Enquiry*, p. 170.

"sensible image" would be as "wild and absurd" as the "chimeras of madmen"; the description of Helen's "fatal beauty", *Illiad* III, ll. 156-8; and Lucretius' account of religion in *De Rerum Natura* I, ll. 62-7 (misquoted). What Burke in the first example calls "thunder" is, in his own translation, the thunderbolt, conventionally the instrument and emblem of the "father of heaven". It also recalls Longinus' celebrated image of the sublime:

The effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport [*εκστασις*]. At every time and in every way imposing speech, with the spell it throws over us, prevails over that which aims at persuasion and gratification. Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing or of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude.¹²

Here Longinus contrasts the controlled emergence of a result in the unfolding of an order, in the shaping of matter, with the irruption of disorder, of an epiphany which collapses this temporal process of emergence and control without thereby ceasing to be timely, without renouncing a certain *tekne*, since it comes "at the right moment".¹³ The sublime would thus complement the unfolding of the well-formed discourse, discharging at once beyond and despite the discursive texture what otherwise would be diluted or suspended within it. It would redouble and condense that movement, epitomising it, and releasing its potential. Before and beyond the "whole texture" of the work or product there would be seen "all" of a plenitude of power which would be manifested in an ordering but also, independently, beyond it and ostensibly at its expense. The

¹² Longinus, I,4, p. 43.

¹³ De Bolla, p. 37, observes the presence of a disturbing suggestion that the sublime is a discursive scattering of everything, only analeptically attributable to a subject.

sublime appears as the productive coupling of the ordered, the phenomenal, the textured, with whatever is revealed to the extent that it fissures, perturbs or explodes it, the interdependence of these two moments of rhetoric comprising a defense against both too much and too little order. It is the "power of the orator" which shapes the discourse, but it only separates itself from a comparatively disempowering Ciceronian rhetorical machinery to the extent that it deforms or destroys it. Together these two principles constitute a new order which would include disorder, in which they would alternate, complementing each other. The static picture, the completed result with its determinable texture becomes active, dynamic, a drama of conflict and resolution, in which what was not discursively pictured is nevertheless represented. The orator is confirmed as the origin at once of order and of force, as the wielder of the thunderbolt.

Burke's "Cyclopean" model of poetic composition is primarily one of force or intensity as the disciplined work of mixing,¹⁴ comparable to that of Longinus' scattering or dissolution of forms, but which is at the same time that of the substitution of words for ideas¹⁵, the violent combination and shaping of natural, pre-linguistic materials as the fit instruments of divine force or violence. In particular, words substitute - and supply an artificial form - for ideas or combinations of ideas which would appear improper, formless or insane were they exposed to view. Words obscure, they blind us to sense especially

¹⁴ According to Virgil "*metumque/Miscebant operi*" ["and they mixed fear with the works"]; *Aeneid* VIII, ll. 431-2. The Cyclops are forging the arms or instruments of the gods under the direction of Vulcan, their master, including Jove's thunderbolt, the chariot of Mars and the aegis of Athena fronted with the severed head of the Gorgon. Each of these is at once an instrument and an emblem or sign of its peculiar divinity.

¹⁵ *Enquiry*, p. 173. ". . . poetry . . . cannot with strict propriety be called an art of imitation . . . *descriptive* poetry operates chiefly by *substitution*; by the means of sounds, which by custom have the effect of realities". The term "idea" (from *idein*, to see) is usually, although not exclusively, employed by Burke in its most accepted sense at that period, that of a mental perception or image. See p. 175: ". . . if they may properly be called ideas which present no distinct image to the mind".

when, as so frequently happens in poetry, it verges on a kind of nonsense: they hold sensation in abeyance. Likewise poetry outstrips mere understanding. It is, in the terms which would be applied to perception, formless, so that in its supreme instances both of sublimity and of beauty its phantoms are featureless, unmarked by efforts at sensible delineation.¹⁶ Therefore its elements are mobile, untethered from the materially determined character of the sensuous image, and within the limits of a more generalised, conventional naturalism,¹⁷ are capable of free or arbitrary combination without impropriety.

The notion that language comprises an order in important respects heterogeneous to nature is in this way interpreted as a liberation and as an accession to a further degree of power, which is discussed by Burke under three heads:

(i) ". . . the influence of most things on our passions is not so much from the things themselves, as from our opinions concerning them; and these again depend very much on the opinions of other men, conveyable for the most part by words only."¹⁸ A strong expression differs from a clear expression in

¹⁶ *Enquiry*, p. 172. Burke asks the following, apropos of Lucretius' description of religion:

What idea do you derive from so excellent a picture? none at all most certainly; neither has the poet said a single word which might in the least serve to mark a single limb or feature of the phantom, which he intended to represent all the horrors the imagination can conceive.

Lucretius' religion is evidently an affiliate of Milton's *Death*, not least because both are at once representations and manifest second-order self-representations: in Burke's terms they characterise at once a concept which is not an idea, and their own specifically verbal, non-imitative character.

¹⁷ *Enquiry*, p. 171:

The truth is, if poetry gives us a noble assemblage of words, corresponding to many noble ideas, which are connected by circumstances of time or place, or related to each other as cause and effect, or associated in any natural way, they may be moulded together in any form, and perfectly answer their end.

¹⁸ *Enquiry*, p. 173.

that the former appeals to the passions rather than the understanding. It describes not the thing as it is but the subjective experience of the thing in terms of feeling, more than making up in power what it loses in clarity.

The truth is, all verbal description, merely as naked description, though never so exact, conveys so poor and insufficient an idea of the thing described, that it could scarcely have the smallest effect, if the speaker did not call to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself. Then, by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another, which probably might never have been struck out by the object described.¹⁹

Mere description must be clothed and invigorated by an infusion of strength and liveliness from another person. This is a special case of the Burkean conviction (shared, amongst others, by Rousseau) that humans are social or artificial beings for whom nature itself is insufficient; that "Man[is] . . . prerogative it is, to be in a great degree a creature of his own making"²⁰ and that, in sum, "Art is man's nature".²¹ To the extent that words are liberated from the demand simply to imitate objects they are able to become the vehicles of the free circulation of affect in the social sphere. The vector of this contagion is a non-pictorial, specifically linguistic "mark" added to the imitation or depiction, frequently vitiating, obscuring or deforming it. Burke explains that a feeling, once it becomes associated with the word which is conventionally combined with the idea to which that feeling originally belonged, becomes detached from the idea or occasion and is annexed to the word as mere "sound", as a conventional linguistic unit.²² In this way affect becomes an object of exchange and, in the process, of a certain possible enhancement of force or value.

¹⁹ *Enquiry*, pp. 175-6.

²⁰ *Reflections*, p. 353.

²¹ Burke, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), *Works* III, p. 86.

²² *Enquiry*, p. 165.

(ii) Linguistic expressions, either by means of their material persistence or their iterability can compensate for the transience or the scarcity of the events they represent, and can even therefore represent "ideas [which] have never been at all presented to the senses of any men but by words, as God, angels, devils, heaven and hell, all of which have however a great influence over the passions"²³. There can emerge a class of entities whose entire existence and not inconsiderable power is social, conventional or linguistic, with no sensory counterparts - other than conventional ones - whatsoever.²⁴ They can become the repositories of large amounts of the affect which is otherwise freely circulating throughout the social and linguistic community. Burke argues that the translation of these terms into images or objects of perception only occurs at the expense^s of a corresponding leakage or diminution of force.

Concepts of good and evil, the elements of the moral law, like other "general words", represent social values, an order of significance or structuring of experience which is prior to experience, being "taught before the particular modes of action to which they belong are presented to the mind"²⁵. They are incapable of resolution into ideational (in the Burkean sense) or experiential counterparts, and are independent of nature, of sensations of pain or of pleasure.

(iii) By means of words "we have it in our power to make such *combinations* as we cannot possibly do otherwise"²⁶. Terms such as "virtue, honour, persuasion, docility", like those discussed under the previous head, are "*compounded abstract words*" formed by an "*arbitrary union*" of other verbal

²³ *Enquiry*, p. 174.

²⁴ *Enquiry*, p. 164. See also J. Turner, "Burke, Paine, and the Nature of Language" *ELH* 54 (2) Summer 1987, 41.

²⁵ *Enquiry*, p. 165.

²⁶ *Enquiry*, p. 174.

types²⁷. As "compositions" they do not correspond to "real essences", nor are they usually associated with even "general ideas". However, over and above this combinatorial facility conceived of as a means of effecting the aggregation or the separation of components of sensory experience there is another notion of combination at work:

In painting we may represent any fine figure we please; but we never can give it those enlivening touches which it may receive from words. To represent an angel in a picture, you can only draw a beautiful young man winged; but what painting can furnish out anything so grand as the addition of one word, "the angel of the *Lord*?"²⁸

Words combine the semantic residue of experiences, sensations, of an entire visible and corporeal world with a secondary invisible, immaterial, essentially social or supernatural dimension. Such a reduction of the diversity and the extreme *proximity* of experience to a semantic residue leaves a mark at once of deprivation and of a corresponding bonus: what there is left of experience is combined with a non-natural combinatorial power. It is this which substitutes, by force, for the ideational and pictorial element. Thus of *Paradise Lost* ii, ll. 621-2 Burke comments as follows:

Here is displayed the force of union in

Rocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens and shades;

which yet would lose the greatest part of their effect, if they were not the

*Rocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens and shades --
-----of Death.*²⁹

²⁷ The others, following Locke (*Essay* III, iv-v), are "aggregate words" representing "many simple ideas *united by nature* to form some one determinate composition", and "simple abstract words" representing "one simple idea of such compositions and no more". See *Enquiry*, pp. 163-4.

²⁸ *Enquiry*, p. 174.

²⁹ *Enquiry*, p. 174. Aspects of the immediate context of these lines, the predicament of the newly fallen angels, are worth recalling in connection with our argument: the decision to make man, "about this time/To be created", a pawn in the contest between good and the newly constituted forces of evil; the question

"Death", or "the *Lord*" - are marks which, in addition to acting as the vectors of invisible communications and of passionate contagions, perform the secondary function of representing and unifying under a single term the supernatural mediating or combinatorial power, which as the "force of union" notionally sets a term to combinations. Both examples - "A Universe of death", "the angel of the *Lord*" - instance the indispensable function of the genitive in this schema in order to effect socialisation, a state of affairs in which terms like "virtue, honour, persuasion" - and "docility" - would be meaningful.³⁰

of bridging "the great Gulf between Hell and Heaven"; and the celebrated encounter with Sin and Death.

Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fixt Fate, free Will, Foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.

Thus roving on
In confus'd march forlorn, th' adventurous Bands
With shuddring horror pale, and eyes agast
Viewd first thir lamentable lot, and found
No rest: through many a dark and drearie Vale
They passd, and many a Region dolorous,
O'er many a Frozen, many a Fierie Alp,
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of
death,
A Universe of death, which God by curse
Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
Abominable, inutterable, and worse
Than fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd,
Gorgons and *Hydras*, and *Chimeras* dire.

(*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 557-

628)

³⁰ Burke's other example is *Aeneid* II, l. 502: "*Sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacra verat ignes*" (*Enquiry*, p. 174), in which Priam's murder by Pyrrhus is represented as the pollution with his blood of the altar fire "which he had himself consecrated", i.e. which is peculiarly his own and which makes possible a certain self-consecration. Aeneas, infuriated by this spectacle, is about to visit revenge upon Helen, when a vision of his mother Venus appears to him and reveals that the destruction of Troy is the work neither of Helen nor of Paris but of the gods Neptune, Juno, Pallas Athene, Jove, and of the Gorgon. She also reminds him of his responsibility to his father Anchises, to his wife Creusa who was later lost to him, and to his son Ascanius (in that order), which is to

"God", "angels", "devils", "heaven", "hell", "death", "good" and "evil" are all prior to experience, and they are cultural or artificial entities without counterparts in experience. All are marks of a secondary mediating and hierarchising power, of an always pre-existing but non-natural regulatory system which liberates but also limits the circulation of affect, and so of power, in the primary system. It does so by prescribing the accumulation of power in relation to these and other strategic terms in that some or all of them in varying degrees double as representations or personifications of that same primary power of combination, accumulation and limitation. In this way the "force of union" also unifies itself and is able at once to people and to order an entire supernatural universe.

At no point, however, does this sphere of enhanced power admit of its translation into experiential terms, since

some words expressing real essences, are so mixed with others of a general and nominal import, that it is impracticable to jump from sense to thought, from particulars to generals, from things to words, in such a manner as to answer the purposes of life; nor is it necessary that we should.³¹

preserve himself and them, and to escape from Troy. Aeneas then consecrates himself to that purpose. See Virgil, *Aeneid* II, ll. 499-623.

Satan's encounter with Sin and Death (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 648-870) which is part of the context of the example which immediately follows this one (see n. 22) reads as a ghastly parody of this episode in the Virgil. Satan, like Aeneas, determines to leave the ruins of defeat in order to found a new empire of sorts and, being opposed, is forestalled in his murderous intent by the intercession of another phantom mother, but one which this time is his consort and his parthenogenetically conceived daughter, and simultaneously the unwilling consort of his yet unrecognised son and the mother of *his* children - "O Father, what intends thy hand, she cri'd,/Against thy only Son?" (ll. 727-8). In this case the original crime of self-pollution is Satan's own, being "Father" and "Author" (l. 864) or finite creator and so inevitably enacting a parody of divine creation. It is the nature and consequences of this which are now revealed to him. The possible mutual destruction of father and son is averted in a scene of family reconciliation presided over by self-interest, and Satan is empowered by this feminine mediation to pass alive beyond the limits of Hell, so to constitute the redemptive history which Milton will record.

³¹ *Enquiry*, p. 167. Burke's point here does not rely, as the editor of the critical edition suggests, on the failure to recognise that "the argument about the effect of

Language is at all times a mixture which would be far too laborious to resolve into its pictorial or ideational elements, something which, to the extent that it would be possible, would be destructive of sense and life. Language in general imitates nothing, even in the sense in which a direct translation may aspire to imitate its original in another medium, and it is for this reason that it can represent everything, the visible and the invisible, including beings which can never be the objects of experience. Even without a consideration of the differentiations effected by the operation of syntactical or grammatical relations of governance and subordination, Burke is able to affirm this by reference to the complexity and diversity of structures of nomination alone, which would fragment any reflection of meaning in terms of sensory equivalents. The experiential grounding of language is in this sense fluid, chaotic and deathly.

Yet a less one-eyed account might ask of this sublime³² union of sensory overload with sensory deprivation whether the force of language overpowers by dissolving in order to recreate the forms of experience, as Burke

language in hurried conversation does not necessarily apply to the reading of poetry" (*Enquiry*, p. lxxix). This second point is independent of the practical contingency expressed in the first and should be referred forward to what I have called Burke's Cyclopean model of poetic composition (p. 171), for which he is at this stage preparing. Since the verbal and the pictorial are non-symmetrical, strictly incommensurable orders associated only by means of conventions and by considerations of utility, each can only be subjected to the protocols of the other at the expense of the reduction, if not in large measure the destruction, of all that is specific to the subjected term. Either (i) such a translation, if it subscribes to the requirements of the visually correct, is also an impoverishment, a degradation of force and in particular of poetic force ("that union of affecting words"), so that what would be lost in such a reading of poetry would be precisely much of the poetry and even the prosaic "the most general effect . . . of . . . words" (p. 167), which is to mediate the circulation of representations and of affect independently of the forms of direct material causation, of our bodies; or (ii) in remaining faithful to the poetic and linguistic mode it must needs violate the orderliness and intelligibility of the sensible and its simulacra, collapsing them into chaos or madness. There is never enough time to read poetry in this way, since in either case it becomes illegible in advance and instead of that reading being accomplished: if there is a time for poetry it does not resemble the temporality of experience which it nevertheless represents.

³² *Enquiry*, pp. 80-1.

suggests, or is the mere defensive reflex of an overpowering or intolerable pressure of sensation, of the unregulated or imperfectly reflected, upon thought - of distraction or madness. This madness or appearance of a madness which would consist in the derangement of appearances, of representations, would be the constant if normally subdued, the enslaved accompaniment of language in general and of poetry in particular. In the Burkean schema the secondary operations of language must build upon by diverging from the - relative to language - primary ones of sensation: but is sensation as such primary or secondary? Is it perhaps also in some way secondary and so in effect a language or part of language? If sensation is also deficient in originality and necessity might these two languages not be construed as contributing to a diversity within language such that in the guise of word and sensation it constantly interferes with itself, energises and degrades itself? Faced with such a possibility it might well seem necessary to seek a non-linguistic ground from which to regulate the relations between word and sensation or picture, and to protect the concomitant syntactical and semantic ordering of the linguistic and social field.

BURKE'S "COMMON LAW OF NATURE"

Language is the specific focus of Part Five of the *Enquiry*, which is not much more than a brief postscript comprising only the last seventeen of one hundred and seventy seven pages of the critical edition. The bulk of the text is characterised by a pervasive sensationalism, and comprises an attempt to provide a grounding for aesthetic and by extension social experience in nature. It proposes a derivation of aesthetic effects, and of the social, from nature, from the body, and ultimately from the divine Father: "Natural objects affect us, by the laws of that connexion, which Providence has established between certain motions and configurations of bodies, and certain consequent feelings in our minds."¹ But it must also observe a stringent limitation:

That great chain of causes, which linking one to another even to the throne of God himself, can never be unravelled by any industry of ours. When we go but one step beyond the immediately sensible qualities of things, we go out of our depth. All we do after, is but a faint struggle, that shows that we are in an element which does not belong to us.²

Nevertheless Burke will risk a partial solution, and a partial breach of a version of that limitation.

It is no small bar in the way of our enquiry into the cause of our passions, that the occasions of many of them are given, and that their governing motions are communicated at a time when we have not capacity to reflect on them; at a time of which all sort of memory is worn out of our minds. For besides such things as affect us in various manners according to their natural powers, there are associations made at that early season, which we find very hard afterwards to distinguish from natural effects . . . But as it must be allowed, that many things affect us after a certain manner, not by any natural powers they have

¹ *Enquiry*, p. 163.

² *Enquiry*, pp. 129-30.

for that purpose, but by association; so it would be absurd on the other hand, to say that all things affect us by association only; since some things must have been originally and naturally agreeable or disagreeable, from which the others derive their associated powers; and it would be, I fancy, to little purpose to look for the cause of our passions in association, until we fail of it in the natural properties of things.³

Here the enquiry is barred not only by an accident of individual development but in addition by the structural precedence of the origin of passions, of portable force, conceived of as a form of social capital. Since association is culturally mediated this phenomenon includes the precedence of the social, the envelopment of the human subject in a historicity, in a proliferation of contexts, which outdistances memory and understanding. Consciousness is consequently suspended between natural determination and associative liberty, a situation to which Burke responds with the affirmation that there must be a natural origin and so a natural history of our passions such that it would be possible to effect a unidirectional derivation of "their associated powers". He must naturalise a surface, a stable commonality of experience, which may then be opposed to the treacherous depths into which we might thereafter be forbidden to venture. He would fend off what he perceives as absurdity or madness by setting a natural limit to human variability and diversity.

Art cannot give the rule to art. It must be ruled, imprinted, and shaped legitimately from without.

Natural objects affect us, by the laws of that connection, which Providence has established between certain motions and configurations of bodies, and certain consequent feelings in our minds . . . But as to words; they seem to me to affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects . . .⁴

The potential chaos of sensation is forestalled by a providential reciprocity, a pre-established harmony of mind and body, such that the body

³ *Enquiry*, pp. 130-1.

⁴ *Enquiry*, p. 163.

functions as the organ of the mind's reception of sensations, as that complement which is, on its behalf, exposed to material processes. There is a clear distinction between facts of corporeal experience and their psychic representatives, but there is also a happy congruence, a God-given condition of being at home in our bodies.

The only difference between pain and terror, is, that things which cause pain operate on the mind, by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind suggesting danger; but both agreeing, either primarily, or secondarily, in producing a tension, contraction, or violent emotion of the nerves, they agree likewise in everything else.⁵

Our minds and bodies are so closely and intimately connected, that one is incapable of pain or pleasure without the other . . . an opiate, or spirituous liquors shall suspend the operation of grief, or fear, or anger, in spite of all our efforts to the contrary; and this by inducing in the body a disposition contrary to that which it receives from those passions.⁶

Such a pre-established harmony would contribute to short-circuiting the potentially infinite detour of arbitrary linguistic signification, much as the continuity between the primary and secondary imaginations in the first volume of the *Biographia* is designed to limit the operations of fancy. However, this reciprocity of mind and body, this natural signification, suggests other possibilities, both hermeneutic and political. If the *Enquiry* can be said to have a hero or tutelary divinity that man is Tomaso Campanella (1568-1639), revolutionary and opponent of scholastic Aristotelianism in the name of a direct study of man and nature. Here he is also a Burkean figure of hermeneutic capability representing a certain possibility of reading others which is at the same time that of the mastery of others through self-mastery.

⁵ *Enquiry*, p. 132.

⁶ *Enquiry*, p. 133.

When he [Campanella] had a mind to penetrate into the inclinations of those he had to deal with, he composed his face, his gesture, and his whole body, as nearly as he could into the exact similitude of the person he intended to examine; and then carefully observed what turn of mind he seemed to acquire by this change. So that, says my author, he was able to enter into the dispositions and thoughts of people, as effectually as if he had been changed into the very men . . . Campanella . . . could so abstract his attention from any sufferings of his body, that he was able to endure the rack itself without much pain . . .⁷

The figure of Campanella couples a one-sided transparency and exchangeability of dealers with an apparently enviable self-possession. It contributes to the depiction of intersubjectivity as mirroring, as the visually mediated correspondence and accommodation of adversarial partners which makes possible effective dealing. This admired pliability of the social body, the instrument of a connection with and manipulation of others, is conditional on its inability to press its own demands, to negotiate on its own behalf, and at the same time on its cleansing of the type of interference, of the disabling heterogeneity within the self which is represented here as originating from without, in "an opiate, or spirituous liquors". The enslavement, the silencing and no less the purification of the body is the prerequisite for this penetration of others. Moreover, the portrait does not fail to include, in emblematic form, the instrument of this violent conformation of the body to instrumentality, of the fabrication of a masterful social self. The rack is merely the symptomatic extension, at once a prosthesis and an emblem of the cultivation and education of the body through pain - a theme of which Burke makes much. Like "Death" and "the *Lord*" it is a secondary representation of the "force of union" comparable to

⁷ *Enquiry*, p. 133. Burke's source is Jacob Spon's *Recherches Curieuses d'Antiquité* (Lyon, 1683). Like Campanella, and like Burke, Spon attempted to break with a certain problematic of the received forms, and so of the historicity of knowledge, and was an early pioneer of empirical research into antiquity. His discussion of Campanella arises in connection with the question of the historical reliability of the likenesses depicted on antique medals. The irony involved in Burke's quotation at this point of a text of Spon's whose authority in this matter he does not establish appears to be unconscious.

Coleridge's acts of "national Rigour" perpetrated in the name of the revolution in France; in Burke's iconography it is effectively Campanella's attribute as was Zeus' thunderbolt, the Gorgon-fronted aegis of Pallas Athena or, more appropriately and in another but closely related context, the gridiron of St. Laurence and the pincers of St. Agatha.

In relation to the passage of affect into the autonomous sphere of language the technology of such a reshaping was one of mixing and confounding the most diverse elements of experience in order to obliterate their individuality and integrity. It was the dismemberment of the world of percepts and the confusion, leading to the disqualification, of perception. Here where the body, the organ of perception, must on the contrary pass whole and alive into culture and history, into the arena of intersubjective struggle and domination, force is expressed as self-discipline associated with the practice of a certain hygiene or abstention where it is not also a question of purgation. If indeed it were possible for the body (as we now know) to secrete its own opiates, if it were even compelled to do so, it would be as if the body could only be made whole, alive and meaningful by an exercise of selective power such that something pertaining to it is separated, killed or ignored ("Art is man's nature"). Again, supposing for just a moment that such a creature as this Campanella could actually exist, it seems reasonable to ask whether a society of these beings would be desirable or even possible.

In fact, the principal object of the *Enquiry* is to argue the advantages of a precise discrimination between the two forms of aesthesis which are at the same time forms of anaesthesia or forgetting, the one which comprises the willed withdrawal of attention and the notoriously seductive one which is independent of the will, which paralyses it and can please it if needs be in its despite. More generally Burke advances a need to split the derivation of the passions in aesthetic experience into two distinct, independent paths: that centred on the individual self which is founded on the experience of pain, and another,

complementary route oriented toward the social which takes its departure from the experience of pleasure.

Pain and pleasure, according to Burke, are simple, positive, absolute rather than relative concepts which are therefore "incapable of definition".⁸ They involve no necessary mixing and no unconscious pleasures and pains - this despite the attempt to rank pain and pleasure on what appears to be a single scale of relative nervous tension and relaxation. The two are separated by a zone of "indifference" which participates in neither pain nor pleasure, a state of ease or tranquillity which is the body's "normal" state, but which, like mere verbal description, is insufficient for the purposes of life, and is even, like the state of those who abuse themselves with drugs, subject to degeneration. The indifferent body must be stroked or goaded into life and strength.

⁸ *Enquiry*, pp. 31-2. Burke is probably referring here to Locke (see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London 1849) II, ii, p. 63) :

Though the qualities that affect our senses are, in the things themselves, so united and blended, that there is no separation, no distance between them; yet it is plain, the ideas they produce in the mind enter by the senses simple and unmixed . . . the clear and distinct perception . . . of those simple ideas . . . being each in itself uncompounded, contains in it nothing but *one uniform appearance, or conception in the mind*, and is not distinguishable into different ideas.

Locke classes pleasure and pain amongst the simple ideas at once of sensation and reflection (II, vi, p. 71).

Burke's affirmation of the non-relation of pleasure to pain is somewhat noteworthy:

. . . pleasure is only pleasure as it is felt. The same may be said of pain, and with equal reason. I can never persuade myself that pleasure and pain are mere relations, which can only exist as they are contrasted: but I think I can discern clearly that there are positive pains and pleasures, which do not at all depend upon each other. Nothing is more certain to my own feelings than this. There is nothing which I can distinguish in my mind with more clearness than the three states, of indifference, of pleasure, and of pain. Every one of these I can perceive without any sort of idea of its relation to anything else.
(p. 33)

As is often the case this type of awkward redundancy betrays all too clearly an acute sense of the illegitimate character of the assertion in question and of the fact that it cannot but show. Such stylistic lapses should be read in connection with Burke's discussion of shame in the *Reflections*.

Providence has so ordained it, that a state of rest and inaction, however it may flatter our indolence, should be productive of many inconveniencies; that it should generate such disorders, as may force us to have recourse to some labour, as a thing absolutely requisite to make us pass our lives with tolerable satisfaction⁹

Burke wishes to provide an independent natural grounding for both self and society: pleasure relates to the support the self requires¹⁰ in a congenial social element, in the grateful permeability of boundaries; pain defines the natural limits of that self, withholding it from otherwise pleasurable dissolution. At the same time differences in the interaction of these principles might provide for the production of differing social types (classes or genders) capable of being ranked on a uniform scale according to the degree of preponderance of one or the other principle - both masterful Campanellas and penetrable, vulnerable or compliant partners for their dealings.

The radical separation of pleasure from pain and their ranking on a single aesthetic scale, in short their nonconvertibility, necessitates the introduction of negative quantities, and it is these which are decisive in forming, in the case of the sublime, what we would call the aesthetic experience proper. Burke's preferred explanation for the operation of these negatives is in terms of "distancing": "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful".¹¹

Thus "negative pain" is to be called not pleasure but delight ("tranquillity shadowed by horror") and has the general character of relief; "negative pleasure", in turn, may be called disappointment or grief ("suffering

⁹ *Enquiry*, pp. 134-5.

¹⁰ *Enquiry*, p. 43: "an entire life of solitude contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror".

¹¹ *Enquiry*, p. 40.

accompanied by pleasure") and takes the form of an experience of loss. By introducing at the level of psychic representatives this polarity involving a negative complement which is not the signifier of the presence of some other thing Burke foreshadows the theme of Part Five, that of a radical break between the orders of language and of sensation. However this point is now modified by the providential investment of the "positive" term by corporeal self-certainty.

The transition from nature to culture occurs as the distancing or the subsidence of the natural affect, as an inmixture of absence or negativity by means of which it is emancipated from corporeal immediacy, and couples with the shadow of its opposite. It is a sloughing of the sign, the psychic representative, from the body so that the sign retains a corporeal imprint. Burke will argue from this that aesthetic experience can function as an ethical or political touchstone, that it is possible to ask whether the representation in question is conformable to the providential constitution of the body. Since for Burke a decisive factor in this constitution is sexual difference, his politics will also inevitably be ordered, covertly or not, in terms of an erotics. At the same time, however, aesthesis is measured as the complementary negation of a quantity of deviation from indifference. It is the correction, the return of the body to itself, to its "normal" state which is also the zero degree of aesthesis, to what might be best conceived as a dimension of differences which fail to register in terms of pleasure or unpleasure. The return of the body to itself thus coincides with its disappearance from the aesthetic scale, is a mere vanishing point.

Thus far our discussion has proceeded as if it referred in a simple fashion to aesthetic experience in general, and it is true that for Burke such an account does represent a kind of paradigm for the aesthetic. But no reader of the *Enquiry* can fail to be struck by ^{the} lack of symmetry which obtains between the two distinct lines of the theoretical derivation. This imbalance takes the form of a limitation or imperfection on the part of the derivation of those passions

concerned with what Burke calls the "society of the sexes", by means of which a transition is effected to the passion for "society in general".

In that line of derivation characterised by sublimity, pain - or nature - is not the ultimate, it is in turn but the representative, the distancing of death: "there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death; nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered an emissary of this king of terrors".¹² Pain is not after all a simple concept. There is pain which is redoubled, there is an intensification or increment of power which is in excess of mere sensation. It might be recalled that Burke also quotes (or rather misquotes) as an example of obscurity, Milton's description of Death:

The other shape,
If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable, in member, joint, or limb;
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either; black he [it] stood as night;
Fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell;
And shook a deadly [dreadful] dart. What seemed his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.¹³

The sublime is linked by Burke to the practices both of religions¹⁴ and of despotic governments. Sovereignty itself is linked to terror: "The power which arises from institution in kings and commanders, has the same connection with terror. Sovereigns are frequently addressed with the title of *dread majesty*."¹⁵ Terror is pre-eminent in relation to society as a totality, to absolute exclusion, to ultimate sanctions such as outlawry and death. It is the experience of a notional absence of a contract or covenant ("*Canst thou draw out*

¹² *Enquiry*, p. 40.

¹³ *Enquiry*, p. 59. See *Paradise Lost* ii, ll. 666-73.

¹⁴ *Enquiry*, p. 67. Burke's examples here are "heathen" religions, but the same point is made in relation to Christianity on p. 80.

¹⁵ *Enquiry*, p. 67.

*Leviathan with an hook? will he make a covenant with thee?*¹⁶), an absence of mediation. ¹⁷

To pass from nature to society requires an appeal to a transcendent authority - God or death, "the king of terrors". At stake in this is "kingship" or absolute authority. When we contemplate God,

invested on every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him . . . no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force that nothing can withstand.

* * *

It is on this principle that true religion has, and must have, so large a mixture of salutary fear; and that false religions generally have nothing else but fear to support them. Before the Christian religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the divinity, and brought it somewhat nearer to us, there was very little said of the love of God.¹⁸

Terror bridges the abyss between nature and society, but only in order to mark it the more definitely. That which is sublime, terrible, profound and obscure is the distinction between society, humanity, and its beyond. It is the absolute difference between the relative and the absolute. The supernatural is the proper object of terror: the terrible is going "but one step beyond the immediately sensible qualities of things", where the "immediately sensible" is that which mediates, it is going out of our depth to struggle but faintly in an element which does not belong to us, in which there is no belonging, so strictly speaking no "us", and no "I". The truly terrible or dreadful is the unmediated, the beyond of society, and so of the human. It therefore cannot be experienced, it is

¹⁶ *Enquiry*, p. 66.

¹⁷ E.g. *Enquiry*, p. 83: "Whatever in sights or sounds makes the transition from one extreme to the other easy, causes no terror, and consequently can be no cause of greatness".

¹⁸ *Enquiry*, pp. 68, 70.

always distanced or represented before we arrive at the stage of that distancing which is to be regarded as specifically aesthetic.

Pain is the emissary of and the substitute for death. It is a sign and a metaphor. The sign is relative specifically to death and to kingship, in that it distances them, and only death is absolute. Coleridge canvassed the possibility of there being two gods in "The Wanderings of Cain", but here there is to be only one king. (Which of the terms is privileged, life or death, is not without extremely important consequences, but perhaps of more significance is the difference between one and two.) For a mode of thought secured so emphatically to the powers and potentials of the body, there is remarkably little to be detected of a Burkean vitalism.

The systematic counterpart to terror in the second line of derivation is the pair of terms "lust/love". However, this pairing is not metaphorical in character, not a matter of the substitution of one thing for another, since the love of women by men we are to understand is "a mixed passion": "Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature [i.e. by lust]; but they are attached to particulars by personal *beauty*."¹⁹ The love of women is transitional in character, it prepares the unmixed "sentiments of tenderness and affection" which subsequently may become freely attached to men and even to other animals whose beauty affects us. This latter passion "is called likewise love, but it has no mixture of lust, and its object is beauty" as opposed to "the beauty of women".²⁰ There is in relation to women, for the men who love them, a contiguity, an intermingling of lust and love, of nature and culture. Since this is not a metaphorical, it is also not a semiotic relation. It is one which implies a weak or impure transition between the two spheres, one which allows no sharp demarcation.

¹⁹ *Enquiry*, p. 42.

²⁰ *Enquiry*, p. 51.

Pain or privation is everywhere more original, more real, and so more powerful than pleasure or abundance: "I am in great doubt, whether any man could be found who would earn a life of the most perfect satisfaction, at the price of ending it in the torments, which justice inflicted in a few hours on the late unfortunate regicide in France".²¹ Only pain descends legitimately from the absolute, the transcendent; the other is by nature relative or immanent. Burke stresses that the passion for society in general is not that which is related to society as a totality. The main point of Part One, Section IX, "SOCIETY and SOLITUDE"²² is that in relation to society as a totality our predominant idea is one of exclusion and consequently of pain and terror. Society no doubt only acquires this aspect of totality when represented notionally from without, which can be the source of "no positive enjoyment". The passion for society in general, then, is for the generality of "*particular society*", for concrete, particular occasions of enjoyment whose deprivations we can withstand with equanimity and can even on occasion welcome.²²

Since the perspective grounded in pain and terror is the semiotic, it is also the theoretical perspective. The sublime thereby pertains to the *hypsos* of a metalanguage, to the elevation which is attributed to the principled overview. As there is no evident absolute, immanent "Life" to balance the originality of death, Burke is not drawn in the direction of varieties of politics which, like Rousseau's concept of the "general will", are susceptible of being read as types of

²¹ *Enquiry*, p. 39. Burke's example is that of the torture and execution by *écartèlement* of the failed regicide Robert Francis Damiens in 1757.

²² ~~Burke stresses that this passion for society in general is not that for society as a totality. The main point of Part One, Section IX, "SOCIETY and SOLITUDE" (p. 43) is that in relation to society as a totality our predominant idea is one of exclusion and consequently of pain and terror. Society no doubt only acquires this aspect of totality when seen notionally from without, which can be the source of "no positive enjoyment". The passion for society in general, then, is for the generality of "*particular society*", for concrete, particular occasions of enjoyment whose deprivations we can withstand with equanimity and can even on occasion welcome, p. 43.~~

"political Pantheism". There is a place for the theoretical sublime - indeed, it is the place from which Burke aspires to write. But a democratic, and likewise a feminine sublime would be a contradiction in terms.

Still, the love of women uncovers something not present or not apparent in the other line of derivation, something which correlates with the absence of a second king (or of a queen). It describes a *process* of acculturation comparable to that by which Burke argues that a feeling becomes detached from the idea or occasion to which it originally belonged and is annexed to a word as a mere conventional linguistic unit, becoming an object of exchange and of an enhancement of value. Lacking its own king, in this regime an otherwise intolerable proximity to the non-human becomes possible and even desirable.

Moreover, the negative complement, the distancing which was so crucial in the constitution of the sublime is here all but irrelevant, it is a mere option. "The passion of love . . . is, like all things which grow out of pleasure, *capable* of being mixed with a mode of uneasiness, that is, when an idea of its object is excited in the mind with an idea at the same time of having irretrievably lost it".²³ The "lust/love" couple stops short of full acculturation, it remains closer to "natural" simplicity and positivity, but that proximity takes the form of a semiotic collapse in which nothing is represented. Neither lust nor love concerns a representation of the other in the way in which delight is relative to a representation or distancing of terror, and grief concerns a memory of a lost object. Here nothing is simple and there are no real positive or negative terms.

²³ *Enquiry*, p. 51, my emphasis. Again, the concept of mixing is prominent. Thus "It is in the nature of grief to keep its object perpetually in its eye, to present it in its most pleasurable views, to repeat all the circumstances that attend it, even to the last minuteness; to go back to every particular enjoyment, to dwell upon each, and to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before; in grief, the pleasure is still uppermost . . ." (p. 37). In grief the object is retained and perfected, and the inmixture of loss is the means of its recovery and its perfection.

One of the things which is revealed in the love of women is that so far as the passions are concerned society lacks the metaphysical grounding enjoyed by the self. Since pleasure is not the emissary of a Life situated metaphorically somewhere in the real, since life has no legitimately designated representative, the life of the body is felt solely in its difference from itself. Only death is absolute. Whereas there is a comparatively direct relation available for the masculine self to culture, via terror, the acculturation of masculine bodies to general society is by contrast indirect and incomplete.

This masculine self has priority over social community at the level of our species-life where genders are constituted, if not at that of rational, individual consciousness. It thus serves as the counterweight to the priority of the collective, of the species, in social existence. The masculine self is affirmed by, and recognises itself in, that which overrides it. But is there a systematic or theoretical justification for this priority and this limitation? Or is Burke arbitrarily deforming his analysis merely to meet conventional expectations of the aesthetic?

HOMER'S "WRETCH"

The question arises, is indifference simple and absolute like pleasure and pain - a claim which Burke does not make - since it is evidently not simply their absence? Why should the absence of terror, if not equal to pleasure, then not consist in a simple reversion to the state of indifference, without the production of discrete negative quantities which have their own affective specificity? What is the nature and derivation of this delight, this absence of something which, utterly unlike the case of the real which is always complete, cannot be filled by the presence of something else?

Thomas Weiskel attempts an answer to these last two questions in association with a meditation on a certain very traditional problematic of reading and writing.

The affective aggrandizement of the sublime moment supports an illusion, a metaphorical union with the creator which suppresses the inferiority of our status as listeners. (Or is it . . . the poor worker of words who is inferior and must avoid at all costs raising by his art the suspicions of an all powerful auditor?)¹

Weiskel proposes a typology of the sublime based on an opposition between reading and writing,² between the positive (the poet's, but also implicitly the idealist or even pantheist³) sublime and the negative (the reader's

¹ Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore and London 1976) p. 4.

² This is the case despite his acknowledgement that "All readers are poets in some degree, and all poets are also readers, so that the modal opposition here adumbrated has no value whatsoever as a scheme for classifying poets or texts or even for reading events" (p. 31, my emphasis). However, what begins as "a preliminary heuristic" becomes by the end of the book something perilously close to a methodology or even an ethics of reading.

³ The poet's sublime would tend toward pantheism since "in its extreme [it] threatens a state of absolute metaphor, 'a universe in which everything is

or hermeneutic, but in addition implicitly the empirical and prosaic) sublime. The "positive" sublime would be characterised by an inability to speak continuously. An excess of meaning (i.e. an excessive metaphoricity⁴), an overload of the signifying apparatus, requires to be displaced metonymically, and motion appears as a defense against discontinuity or obsessive fixation. In the negative sublime we encounter an inability to read metaphor, a frustrated literalism. This deficiency of meaning (or excess on the plane of signifiers) is countered by a defensive proliferation of metaphorical associations.⁵

To the question of whether the always unavoidable combination of the two is capable of being harmonious, of comprising a synthesis, Weiskel is unable to reply. However, his often brilliant book concludes with a reading of the Simplon Pass episode from the *Prelude* in which an evocation of "the unmediated path of imagination" (VI, ll. 592-616) is denied in the immediately subsequent "types and symbols" passage (ll. 617-40). The two paragraphs, the "positive and negative poles of the Romantic sublime", are here "dialectically confronted", although they are united by "No moment of consciousness" on the part of the "I" of the poem.⁶ The principle of their unity must be sought elsewhere:

In life, it is our defenses that enable us to exist and therefore to create; so in poetry, the fiction of originality founds a poet. That the critic must be aware of the dialectical, "negative" structure of originality is

potentially identical with everything else" (p. 26). The quotation is from Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton 1957) p. 124.

⁴ Metaphor here includes the structure of signification as one of substitution but does not of course imply that meaning is the same as naming. Instead naming is problematised in terms of its inextricable relationship to the axis of contiguity or metonymy (grammar, syntax etc.). Weiskel is of course drawing on Roman Jakobson's celebrated "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" in R. Jakobson and M. Halle *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague 1956) pp. 55-82.

⁵ Weiskel. pp. 28-31.

⁶ Weiskel, p. 204.

precisely what separates his perspective from the poet's. For the critic the fiction of originality can never be a final term, but this situation does not render the power of the founding fiction any the less efficacious.⁷

The exigencies of "life", transported by analogy it would seem from outside the poetic text, require the insulation of poetry and of power from criticism. Weiskel's aim is in fact closely related to Burke's: to affirm in some form, however qualified, the originality and independence of the self against that of "the mediating signs or characters which abide at the threshold". As in the case of *Biographia* XIII, the moment of a critical encounter with poetic power is forestalled, this time in the image of positive and negative poles held apart only by the absence of a "moment of consciousness" which would connect them. But such an abrupt, unmediated transition is the stuff of the sublime in general, whether "positive" or "negative".⁸ It seems that Weiskel, via Wordsworth, has merely repeated or reproduced the problem, and accordingly that there may be a remainder in the concept of the sublime yet to be unfolded.

Weiskel's analysis of the concept of "delight" as it appears in the *Enquiry* begins by noting that it is at this point that - by means of a mediation the nature of which is still to be clarified - the explication of Burke passes over into interpretation. It then continues with a reading of "Burke's only attempt to characterise delight by more than a 'sort of'".⁹

We have on such occasions found, if I am not much mistaken, the temper of our minds in a tenor very remote from that which attends the presence of a positive pleasure; we have found them in a state of much sobriety, impressed with a sense of awe, in a sort of tranquillity shadowed with horror. The fashion of the countenance and the gesture of the body on such occasions is so

⁷ Weiskel, p. 203. What prompts such defenses in connection with Weiskel's attempted humanistic recuperation of the sublime is above all the recognition, expressed at the commencement of his study, that "A humanistic sublime is an oxymoron" (p. 3).

⁸ See *Enquiry*, p. 83 and Weiskel, p. 17.

⁹ Weiskel, p. 88.

correspondent to this state of mind, that any person, a stranger to the cause of the appearance, would rather judge us under some consternation, than in the enjoyment of any thing like positive pleasure.

ως δ οτ ανδρ ατη πυκινη λαβη, ος τ ενι πατρη
φωτα κατακτεινας αλλων εξικετο δημον,
ανδρος εσ αφνειου, θαμβος δ εχει εισορωντας,

Iliad. 24.

*As when a wretch, who conscious of his crime,
Pursued for murder from his native clime,
Just gains some frontier, breathless, pale, amaz'd;
All gaze, all wonder!*

This striking appearance of the man whom Homer supposes to have just escaped an imminent danger, the sort of mixt passion of terror and surprize, with which he affects the spectators, paints very strongly the manner in which we find ourselves affected upon occasions in any way similar.¹⁰

Weiskel traces a sequence of readings of this Homeric text by Pope in his translation and by Burke, who quotes Homer and Pope, as a series of deviations from the original, authoritative meaning. Firstly, there arises the observation that "here (as often) Pope has neatly glossed over a difficulty". In Homer the fugitive is a victim of *ate*, "a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness . . . a partial and temporary insanity".¹¹ *Ate* is the cause of

¹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry* pp. 34-5, quoted by Weiskel, pp. 88-9. Burke's quotation is from Pope's translation of *Iliad* XXIV, ll. 590-3, (misquoted).

¹¹ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951) p. 5, quoted by Weiskel, p. 89. The agencies responsible for the production of *ate* in the Homeric texts are autonomous supernatural beings and the suffering of *ate* is not an occasion for or the result of a moral judgement on the sufferer, it is "unaccountable". Dodds also points out that in addition to this disempowerment, this loss of judgement or reason, the gods can confer *menos*, "power", upon men. This is the "vital energy, the 'spunk', which is not always there at call, but comes and goes mysteriously". It is not simply or only random, however: "Sometimes, indeed, the *menos* can be roused by verbal exhortation; at other times its onset can only be explained by saying that a god has 'breathed it into' the hero" (p. 9). Thus, according to the circumstances, there is and there is not a discursive *tekne* relating to this influx of power. *Ate* and *menos* are both disturbances of the intelligible, narratable order of conscious experience which testify to an absence of identifiable agency within the self, to a failure of self-possession. In this connection Dodds observes that "Homeric man has no unified concept of what we call 'soul' or 'personality'", and remarks pithily that in the Homeric texts "the only recorded function of the *psyche* in relation to the living man is to leave him" (pp. 15-6).

his crime rather than the result - "*Ate* sent as punishment is post-Homeric". That Pope's "wretch" is "conscious of his crime", which Weiskel tells us means that he "feels guilty", is "not from Homer but from Pope". The translation simplifies - "glosses over" - in that it involves a reversal of emphasis from causes to effects which is also in some measure a reversal of perspective from that of the opacity, the density of an activity or an event to one of interpretation, to the addition of a gloss. A less "free" translation is then offered: "as when dense *ate* has seized a man, and he has slain one in his native land and come to the land of strangers, to a rich man's house, and amazement possesses those who see him". It should be noted in reply to Weiskel that the concept of *ate* has not been simply suppressed in the translation, but we shall find that, as is the nature of these things, it has been displaced: Pope's transportation of the action signalled by the qualification of the wretch as one who "*Just gains some frontier*" also allows the qualification of the experience in question as one of some bewildering, indeterminate frontier between the native and the strange.

Burke is pictured by Weiskel as having in all likelihood, following Pope, "fused" or mixed in his reading of *ate* the notions of "insanity, punishment, disaster and guilt", to have made an error of scholarship "as have better Greek scholars than he". The point, which is of considerable interest, is vitiated by one circumstance, however. Homer describes a primary experience of *ate*, of madness, after which a man is found transported beyond his native borders, to the amazement of the inhabitants. Pope's secondary revision explicitly attributes consciousness of having committed a crime to the fugitive, but it is Weiskel who further determines this to be guilt, in Burke's "likely" reading of Pope which is also to be conceived as "Burke's own unconscious projection".

Weiskel's point is that it is "in the way the quotation says more than he had planned on - that Burke's own unconscious projection may be located", and the quotation says more not least in that it is presumed to carry with it, for Burke, resonances of the context from which it was "torn". Weiskel recognises

that this is despite the fact that such a scenario of violent tearing which must needs mark the extract in such a way that the reader is led back to at once the reconstruction and the undoing of that event is impaired in its persuasiveness by an already existing discontinuity evidenced in the manner in which "Homeric similes defeat our desire for a neatly homologous tenor".¹²

The quotation consists of a simile for Achilles' amazement at the spectacle of Priam in the guise of "Kingly Suppliant" suing for the body of Hector, a reversal of fortune comparable to Aristotle's tragic *peripeteia*. It is read as evincing the sublimation of anger into wonder due to Priam's astute move of identifying himself with Achilles' father, Peleus. Thus "it is as if Achilles' (unconscious) guilt [for his treatment of Hector] were relieved by being projected onto the fugitive [Priam, Hector's father] who escapes punishment". Burke's "awe", like the "surprize" of the inhabitants of the rich man's house, would then amount to the affective correlative of a positive identification with the Father in the manner of a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, "the basis of culture itself".¹³

Priam is at once father and son, king and suppliant, and this dual position opens the pathway of identification and of symbolisation by means of which Achilles absolves himself. Symbolisation emerges as the possibility of reversal, of passage, which would remit what was at the same time incurred: if the son usurps the place of the father, then in the guise of father he is empowered to forgive himself that transgression in as much as he resubmits himself to the authority which *to that extent* has become his own, according to the attributive, substitutive or fictional logic of the symbol (the symbol as always symbolic of

¹² Weiskel, P. 90.

¹³ Weiskel, p. 94.

something, *for* someone).¹⁴ For Weiskel this reading is possible because the Homeric text also occupies a dual position: "Homer's world is on the verge of passing into a guilt culture" from a shame culture, so that in this staging of the Homeric action "everything happens as if a guilt culture were in the wings!",¹⁵ as if it comprised a textual unconscious or "deep structure" manipulating and orienting the action. Here the Homeric text is effectively a "Kingly Suppliant", which would licence or contribute to absolving the deployment of hermeneutic violence, of quotation and of other types of analytical or paraphrastic dismemberment and appropriation which are figured as the profanation of the corpse of a vanquished foe. In the end text and self would be "restored" to wholeness, but the dialectic commenced by their encounter would have effected both an appropriation and an augmentation of the sublime authority of the text, of its capacity to unsettle or subdue, evidenced in a new-found hermeneutic mastery.

But this will not really do either. Just as the *Iliad* was found to be already fissured and diverse before there was any question of its being "torn" apart and its reading thence assimilated to a narrative of crime and restitution, Weiskel must conclude that "It is a dubious enterprise to psychoanalyze Homer or his heroes, and of course it is probably anachronistic to read the oedipal

14 The trouble with Milton's Satan is that he would surpass at one leap this continuous cycle of attribution and of subjection, would "in a moment quit/The debt immense of endless gratitude,/So burthensome still paying, still to ow". He "understood not that a grateful mind/By owing owes not, but still pays, at once/Indebted and discharged" (*Paradise Lost* IV, ll. 51-7). Satan is not satisfied with an attributed existence, not least because he stubbornly reads the mechanism of attribution, of angelic sublimation, in reverse: i.e. in a manner which begins to foreshadow what Blake's revisionism called "its infernal or diabolical sense" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Plate 24), which is also its poetic sense. Like many another irresolvable hermeneutic point the issue is thereafter settled by force, in this case by war in heaven.

15 Weiskel, p. 91.

crisis into the feelings of Achilles, who inhabits a shame-culture".¹⁶ What counts for Weiskel is not the original meaning of the Homeric text but Burke's anachronistic and unscholarly projection, the thesis that "the 'imminent danger' to which we are exposed and from which we are then released in the sublime moment is an unconscious fantasy of parricide". Yet even here he acknowledges that the evidence that an Oedipal fantasy participates in the "deep structure" of the terrible sublime is "extremely oblique", the indications "too slender" to be really persuasive. The Burkean text will not in this way sustain an authoritative transition from explication to interpretation.

Anachronism (or analepsis) is found to disrupt the setting in place of the narrative, which is also the theory, of the sublime as sublimation, as the assumption of a supererogatory hermeneutic power derived from but greater than the power of the text. It also would disturb Weiskel's project of reading Burke in terms of Kant and both via Freud amongst others, notably Nietzsche and Lacan. Weiskel's argument is dialectical in form, and the discussion of Burke is limited in its objectives by its place in the elaboration of that dialectic. But there is a recognition, for example, that "the oedipal formation with all its vagaries and derivatives is superimposed upon an original ambivalence", that of desire and fear in relation to an excess, to a prospect of inundation or annihilation. Nevertheless Weiskel affirms, referring to Kant's distinction between the mathematical and dynamic sublimities, that "though the [primary, maternal] sublime of magnitude does not originate in a power struggle, it almost instantaneously turns into one as the secondary oedipal system takes over"¹⁷ as a reaction formation against the threat of a desired engulfment.¹⁸ What remains at

¹⁶ Weiskel, pp. 91-2.

¹⁷ Weiskel, pp. 105-6.

¹⁸ See Neil Hertz, "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime" in his *The End of the Line*, p.53. Hertz points out that,

this point is to question the significance of this "almost", and to do so in connection with that of Burke's "sort of".

Weiskel astutely observes in relation to the "sort of mixt passion of terror and surprize" that "Burke's syntax makes obscure the relation between the feelings of the spectators [or readers, of those who "have committed no crime"] and those of the fugitive", of the notional author of the enigma which he has himself become. This observation elicits a characteristic attempt to separate the mixture, to allocate "surprize" to the spectators and "terror" to the fugitive, and in doing so to dispel a significant component of the obscurity which, according to Burke, is one of the principal characteristics of the sublime, and at least one of its main sources of power. In fact, Weiskel does not address the conclusion of Burke's own gloss to the Homeric episode. He proposes a detailed examination of Burke's theory, but this takes the form of an assimilation of the argument to that of Kant, who is described merely as being "subtler, and his emphasis on identification is stronger".¹⁹

For Burke's own conclusion on the character and derivation of delight this phase effectively substitutes a selective reading of his account of ambition,²⁰ one of the "social passions", which *does* involve in qualified form identification and interiorisation in a manner somewhat comparable to the sublime of Kant, and is the occasion of Burke's only positive reference to Longinus in the *Enquiry*. (Predictably this is to the remark at VII, 2: "For, as if

The scholar's *wish* is for the moment of blockage, when an indefinite and disarrayed sequence is resolved (at whatever sacrifice) into a one-on-one confrontation, when numerical excess can be converted into that supererogatory identification with the blocking agent that is the guarantor of the self's own integrity as an agent.

¹⁹ Weiskel. p. 94.

²⁰ Steven Knapp, in his *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1985) pp. 67-73 advances similar arguments concerning these passages.

instinctively, our soul is uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard".²¹) However, Burke is careful to separate the passionate workings of androcentric gender identification and aesthetic experience as such - significant, arguably fundamental components of the wisdom of the species - from the cognitive, individualistic and uncertain operations of ambition. The dialectic of identification, appropriation and interiorisation is located by Burke not in the operation of the passions belonging to self-preservation which are capable to giving rise to the experience of the sublime, but amongst the social passions which are equally related to pleasure, in the operation of ambition. The social passions "branch out into a variety of forms agreeable to that variety of ends they are to serve in the great chain of society".²² The "three principal links" in this chain, and its first great branching, concern sympathy, "a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another",²³ and its modification inasmuch as sameness (imitation) or difference (ambition) is stressed in the sympathetic relation. Sympathy and its derivatives may turn equally on ideas of pain or of pleasure, thus this passion which is most effectively promoted by the experience of the sublime is markedly ambivalent:

God has planted in man a sense of ambition . . . and certain it is, that where we cannot distinguish ourselves by something excellent, we begin to take a complacency in some singular infirmities, follies, or defects of one kind or other. It is on this principle [of ambition] that flattery is so prevalent; for flattery is no more than what raises in a man's mind an idea of a preference which he has not. Now whatever either on good or bad grounds tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are

²¹ Longinus, p. 55.

²² *Enquiry*, p. 44.

²³ *Enquiry*, p. 44.

conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates. Hence proceeds what Longinus has observed of that glorying and sense of inward greatness, that always fills the reader of such passages in poets and orators as are sublime; it is what every man must have felt in himself upon such occasions.²⁴

Ambition is the corrective proposed by Burke to imitation, a major educational and socialising force which "forms our manners, our opinions, our lives":

it is a species of mutual compliance which all men yield to each other, without constraint to themselves, and which is extremely flattering to all. Herein it is that painting and many other agreeable arts have laid one of the principal foundations of their power.²⁵

Imitation forms the self by giving it a borrowed form. It is at once a mutual yielding and a mutual flattery and is thus aligned primarily with beauty, for in the case of the sublime "we submit to what we admire, but [in that of the beautiful] we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance".²⁶ Imitation is also in Burke's view non-progressive and can only issue in social stagnation, so it is at this point, to couple with imitation in order that together they might make historical progress or a narratable history possible, that ambition makes its appearance.

Ambition is aligned primarily with sublimity, with masculinity, and with poetry and oratory, but this version of the dialectic of identification, of defining the self as the same but different, is compromised as sublimity ought not to be: it can attach itself no less to an infirmity or a defect such as is characteristic of beauty²⁷ than to a capacity or a perfection, and it may devolve

²⁴ *Enquiry*, pp. 50-1.

²⁵ *Enquiry*, p. 49.

²⁶ *Enquiry*, p. 113.

²⁷ *Enquiry*, p. 110:

into mere flattery or deception, perhaps of others but more particularly of the self.²⁸ The status of ambition, of the aspiration toward originality and authenticity, is uncertain because it can always be read as unacknowledged or deluded imitation, as borrowing the mere form or dress of the terrible object (which may itself be in turn no more than such a form or dress) without attaining to real internal or substantial similarity, without ever constituting an interior or a substance.

In Burke's account the dialectic of identification would consign Weiskel's supererogatory hermeneutic power and theoretical capability alike to a limbo of perpetual (priapic) aspiration. Both would amount to ambitions whose achievement could never be verified, to characterisation as metalanguages whose elevation may be no more than a deluded self-flattery.

Weiskel does not quote Burke's own conclusions²⁹ drawn from the example of Homer's fugitive, in which he attempts to distinguish between

²⁸ Thus Longinus, (III, 4) p. 49, characterises unfulfilled ambition in terms of the union of apparent phallicisation with disease:

But evil are the swellings, both in the body and in diction, which are inflated and unreal, and threaten us with the reverse of our aim; for nothing, say they, is drier than a man who has the dropsy. While tumidity desires to transcend the limits of the sublime, the defect which is termed puerility [το δε μειρακιοδες] is the direct antithesis of elevation, for it is utterly low and mean and in real truth the most ignoble vice of style.

"Puerility" here refers to "a pedant's thoughts [ος σκολαστικι νοεσις], which begin in learned trifling" but "drift unawares" thence to "end in frigidity" (p. 49). It characterises the bad student, the boy-scholar who unconsciously reverses the hierarchy which accords primacy to transcendence, whose aspirations are set adrift by a treacherous propensity for reversal implicit in the mechanisms of Ciceronian rhetoric and no less in the pedagogy and pedophilia which are the relevant mechanisms of homosocial reproduction.

In this connection see also Paulson's observation in relation to the *Prelude* V, ll. 290-336 that "Wordsworth saw the Revolution ["a monstrous arrested child"] as inextricably involved with his own youth, with young men like himself as its metaphorical progenitor", in R. Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven and London 1983) pp. 256-7.

²⁹ *Enquiry*, pp. 35-6.

absolute and relative modes of affection and so to accomplish separate derivations of beauty and sublimity. We must now begin to trace the derivation of this separation, the first steps of which task have been taken by Frances Ferguson.

For Ferguson Burke's text also has the appearance of being divided, of being caught between "two logically exclusive positions", those of "a completely nonsubjective (nonidealist) scientism on the one hand and a completely subjective irrationalism on the other".³⁰ However, she argues that this appearance is largely an artifact of the perspective of "modern criticism" - represented among others by Harold Bloom - which, by maintaining an interpretation of the sublime in terms of a "heroism of subjectivity" has obscured an historical, eighteenth and nineteenth century emphasis on the universality of aesthetic experience, on a legislative and representative function.

the sublime hero of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was strikingly different from our modern versions not only in that he quoted almost obsessively from epics but also in that he aspired to the condition of an epic hero, so that he, like Aeneas, might be taken as a metonymy of his culture.³¹

More particularly it has overlooked a possible reading of the sublime as a "redeemed" "phenomenology of perception *about* aesthetics and psychology but not *of* them (in their usual extensions)". Sublimity in this account would be concerned with the possibility of an accommodation between the points of view represented by idealism and empiricism in terms of the mutual implication of self and world. It would have the potential to go some way toward resolving the fruitless agon between subject and object which plagues "modern criticism".

Like Weiskel, Ferguson is drawn in the course of her argument to comment on certain of Burke's "unscholarly lapses" in his handling of quotations,

³⁰ F. Ferguson, "The Sublime of Edmund Burke, or the Bathos of Experience", *Glyph* 8, p. 65.

³¹ Ferguson, p. 63.

in this case his "infidelity to his texts". Such failures of mimesis, treated as indications of significant or symptomatic cognitive disturbance, are referred to Burke's own categories: do they belong to the order of experience of sublimity or of beauty? In unpacking this question Ferguson is able to interpret it as a version of Weiskel's, that of who - if anyone - is the master in reading, and in the deployment of quotation.³² It is, after all, Burke who identifies the sublime with that which is able to hurt us, and the beautiful with that which we have the power to hurt.

Certain contradictions in Burke's frequent appeals to linguistic usage suggest a possible approach along lines represented by Paul de Man's insistence on the irreducible character of a rhetorical operation which would disturb the rationalising and communicating capacities of ^Sdiscourse. But such a move, we are to understand, would amount to an unhistorical collapsing of the distinction between the rhetorical sublime of Longinus and the eighteenth and nineteenth century natural sublime. In this scenario "rhetoric nullifies nature", and Ferguson comments in a note that "it is also possible to see how the primacy of rhetoric in his [de Man's] critical system verges on establishing a metaphysics of rhetoricity".³³ This tendency toward the collapse of distinctions in the face of an "omnipresent rhetoricity" appears to be but a special case of a veritable antinomy of the sublime or of the original which is no less troublesome for being extremely familiar. The experience of sublimity is supposed by Burke to possess universal validity, but its assimilation to an order of knowledge, universality and communicability, to a sphere of cognitive or theoretical mastery, can only be destructive of that strangeness and singularity, that distinction in which it chiefly consists. The sublime emerges as curiously self-cancelling, so that "at

³² Another way of formulating this question is in terms of the difference between authorship and plagiarism.

³³ Ferguson, p. 78.

moments it resembles a null set, or a category of experience that can only be spoken of elegiacally".³⁴ Furthermore, since the sublime concerns a threat which is distanced or simulated, it seems in danger (real this time) of appearing a mere "shell game". (Weiskel calls this, a little ponderously, the "mediated conditionality of the sublime moment".³⁵) But Ferguson's object is to redirect the analysis away from such concerns and toward "the neat binarism of 'the sublime *and* the beautiful"³⁶ so unaccountably neglected by Weiskel and others, and to a more fundamental question of the constitution and stabilisation of the categories of self and world. Such an enquiry would take precedence over theoretical attempts to police or to unravel (to "deconstruct", perhaps) the operations of merely mundane reasoning.

Beauty, for Burke, while it resembles sublimity in that it exceeds the purview of our reason, differs from it in that it "recurs throughout the Enquiry in the form of a seductive and indirect assault on the reason". Where the sublime forces us, the beautiful flatters us into compliance, "robbing us of our vigilance and recreating us in its own image".³⁷ Its effect is one of entropy, of morbidity, in the natural and the social body alike. (According to Burke, Homer's Trojans, unlike his Greeks, excelled in the "amiable social virtues" associated with beauty rather than the warlike ones associated with the sublime.³⁸) The fascination it exerts is that of a deceptive but flattering suggestion of similarity or analogy. While recreating us in *its* image, expropriating and finally annihilating us, it appears to conform, and to conform us, to *our* image, to that of

³⁴ Ferguson, p. 72.

³⁵ Weiskel, p. 93.

³⁶ Ferguson, p. 69.

³⁷ Ferguson, p. 75.

³⁸ *Enquiry*, p. 158.

our desires. The beautiful is above all the deceitful, as the feminine is the false or deficient likeness. It is that which accomplishes its work by stealth, making us unwitting "accomplices in our own deaths", as consciousness is dissipated in the widening but enticing gap between appearance and reality.

The sublime, by contrast, serves to remind us of the thing which beauty makes us forget: our mortality. Thus, "for all the obscurity of sublimity, there is a peculiar clarity as well - you know the danger you're in". For Ferguson the sublime in Burke functions as the unmasking of and so as the "antidote" to the concealed threat of the beautiful, of the social, and, although she does not say so, of the feminine and of the text, which last would likewise draw us into a presumed relation of similarity as the prerequisite of any hermeneutics. This antidote is knowledge of death, knowing the danger you're in, but knowledge here figures primarily as appropriation, as recognition of one's own death, of oneself as finite, dying: "later commentators [such as Schiller] who see the sublime as authorizing suicide appropriately extend the Burkean desire to gain control over one's life, one's death" - to die in one's own way.³⁹

The eighteenth and nineteenth century natural sublime is "*that which can never be taken away from you by anyone else*" because, as an "opting out" of the social, the unmasker of the beautiful is exempt from contractual, conventional relations of referentiality and truth, and so is itself exempt from unmasking.⁴⁰ The sublime masters us, but through it we master a more powerful force, we acquire, somewhat in the manner of Weiskel, a supererogatory power. Such a schematisation of course lends itself to narratives of origins, of crime and restitution; to, amongst other things, a developed rhetoric of the tragic, which is to say (in the most common modern acceptance of tragedy) a rhetoric of sublimation. Thus Ferguson observes that "the fatal flaw

³⁹ Ferguson, p. 76.

⁴⁰ Ferguson, p. 73.

that Burke's category of the beautiful uncovers in man is his need for 'social communication', as Milton's Adam puts it in his request that God supplement his individual self with a likeness".⁴¹ This misogynist "fatality" of course merely awaits recuperation as a "fortunate fall".

De Man's "scholarly" but unhistorical text would appear to forget, under the sway of a beautiful theoretical analogism, the complexity of the dimension of the partly affective, irreducibly subjective constitution of the objects of cognition. In doing so it would obscure the characteristic lucidity of the sublime moment. But again, as was the case in Weiskel's reading of Pope, it is Ferguson who forces the imputed determination; who, accurately observing the way in which de Man's work "verges on . . . a metaphysics of rhetoricity", pushes it definitively over the verge and so obscures an entire thematics and problematics of the verge in those texts, and on the basis of this conserves the notion of sublimity as (self-)revelation. Only in this way can de Man's critique be represented as already comprehended by Burke's account of the beautiful, and as answered by his account of the sublime, in the forms in which they are represented by Ferguson.⁴² Ferguson's analysis is halted at the level of the binarism of "the sublime and the beautiful" and of the corresponding binarisms of subject and object, masculine and feminine, writing and reading, just as Weiskel's was arrested by the disjunction of the positive and negative sublimes, and as Coleridge's deduction in the *Biographia* was interrupted by the desynonymisation of imagination and fancy. It baulks not only at de Man's but at Burke's own thematisation of the verge, and at his figuration at a level more original than that of the beautiful of a degenerative, disabling tendency.

⁴¹ Ferguson, pp. 76-7. The reference is to *Paradise Lost* VIII, l. 429.

⁴² For what amounts to a comprehensive reply to this type of misinterpretation which also touches upon questions of scholarship see "The Resistance to Theory" in P. de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis 1986) pp. 3-20.

Weiskel and Ferguson both aspire to found more or less complicated narratives of redemption, and of sublimation. Accordingly they deprecate anachronism and analepsis, (the "unhistorical") and so both: (i) posit a text which is accorded a legislative function, providing the rule for its readers, a hypothetical norm or regulatory principle of immediate self-interpretation; and (ii) attempt to derive a supererogatory hermeneutic power. Burke's position on the nature and derivation of delight, which begins to be presented immediately after the point where Weiskel's discussion breaks off, suggests some points of interest in relation to this approach. Once again we find a recourse to a language of approximation ("something like"):

when we have suffered from any violent emotion, the mind naturally continues in something like the same condition, after the cause which first produced it has ceased to operate. The tossing of the sea remains after the storm; and when this remain of horror has entirely subsided, all the passion, which the accident raised, subsides along with it; and the mind returns to its usual state of indifference.⁴³

This explanation draws on the materialist underpinnings of Burke's sensationalism (see pp. 134-5, quoted below). It posits the persistence in the body's material of the agitation of terror in the absence or distancing of its cause, such that the experience is mixed, indefinite, a moment of passage between sensation and indifference, between too much and too little stimulation. Because it falls between the madness of passion and the deadening clarity of cognition, it comprises a suspension both of activity and of thought.⁴⁴ But this material, corporeal memory or echo, this involuntary or automatic repetition, yields delight in that it is also to be considered a purgation, a catharsis. Here Burke borrows the concept which organises much of Aristotle's reply to Plato's

⁴³ *Enquiry*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ *Enquiry*, p. 57.

accusations of intoxication and of irresponsibility against the poets in the *Ion* and the *Republic*:

Providence has so ordained it, that a state of rest and inaction, however it may flatter our indolence, should be productive of many inconveniencies; that it should generate such disorders, as may force us to have recourse to some labour, as a thing absolutely requisite to make us pass our lives with tolerable satisfaction; for the nature of rest is to suffer all the parts of our bodies to fall into a relaxation, that not only disables the members from performing their functions, but takes away the vigorous tone of fibre which is requisite for carrying on the natural and necessary secretions. At the same time, that in this languid and inactive state, the nerves are more liable to the most horrible convulsions, than when they are sufficiently braced and strengthened. Melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder, is the consequence of the gloomy view that we take of things in this relaxed state of body.⁴⁵

it is probable, that . . . the understanding itself [like "the imagination, and perhaps the other mental powers"] makes use of some fine, corporeal instruments in its operation . . . to have them in proper order, they must be shaken and worked to a proper degree . . .⁴⁶

As common labour, which is a mode of pain, is the exercise of the grosser, a mode of terror is the exercise of the finer parts of the system . . . if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, they are capable of producing delight . . .⁴⁷

This purgation enlivens, invigorates, and enables. It is directed against a tendency already present toward disorder and degeneration, against the dissolution of the purposeful unity of the organism in "horrible convulsions", and of consciousness in despair or even suicide. Phallicisation is based on elimination, on a divinely licenced or enjoined deviation from the norm. In Burke's theoretical but again redemptive schematisation the concept of

⁴⁵ *Enquiry*, pp. 134-5.

⁴⁶ *Enquiry*, p. 135.

⁴⁷ *Enquiry*, p. 136.

indifference is that of a natural insufficiency, an insufficiency of nature and of experience related to that of verbal description, of mimesis in general and specifically of neo-classical pictorialism. But it comprises a chaos out of which is to be evolved and which will in a sense nourish, providentially, the fullness of man's social being.

Beauty, as a relaxation below natural tone, may be viewed at once as accomplishing a pleasurable acceleration of entropy, and as a specific mode of its thematisation. The effect of that which produces "the pleasure of resemblance" is a merging, an unconscious sliding towards death. Beauty thematises imitation, resemblance, and pictorialism, all that belongs to the sensory or phenomenal, to the extent that it is at once murderously defective and the concealment of that defect. It concerns degenerative fragmentation in the form of the characteristic refusal of the defect as such to present itself for identification, but more than this it addresses, in relation to the analogical basis of recognition, the contamination of the process of identification and of the subject of that process. This originary deceit is envisaged as paralysing reason from within to the extent that mimesis underpins the embodiment of *ratio* as *logos* or discourse. But, despite Burke's apparently careful attempt to separate that in the aesthetic which pertains to sensation from that which concerns language, or divine from human and therefore fallible legislation, this critique of the mimetic model is not conceived of as apart from experience, from perception. It is rather the convergence (or more strictly the non-convergence) of the problematics of the concept and of the percept as expressed in the contemporary, in large part Lockean, notion of the *idea* which constitutes, for Burke, the domain of the aesthetic.⁴⁸ This comprehends both of what empirical consciousness is inclined to ascribe to the linguistic and to the non-linguistic fields. The characterisation

⁴⁸ See Weiskel, p. 17: "The true function of the sublime is to legitimate the necessary discontinuities in the classical scheme of signification and to justify the specific affective experience which these continuities entailed."

of beauty accordingly functions as an element in a critique of the dominant strains of eighteenth century rationalist and empiricist semiotics, including of course powerful components of the developing ideologies of revolution.

The sublime is represented as the revelation, the thematisation of the concealed threat of beauty and more generally of analogy, of the imputation of similarity or exchangeability. Sublimity functions by stripping away or purging the feminine attributes, the deadly deceptiveness of beauty. It is in this way a figuration of the feminine as itself a deception, as disposable, as inessential. But the sublime is nonetheless complicit with the motif of concealment in that it notionally transports the threat elsewhere, in the direction of a masculine power or authority, distancing it in order to appropriate it, positing its similarity and its belonging. Where beauty seemingly forgets, the sublime memorialises, it monumentalises death. But in doing so it forgets its own implication in the beautiful, in the internal relationship of revelation to concealment which constitutes the deceptive but fascinating beauty which on occasion, in certain lights and from certain angles, glances from the phenomenal, the recognisable. Burke's "sublimity" is, after all, cognate in important respects with his "ambition". Divine legislation appears all too human: the authoritative immediacy and hence universality of the experience of delight is susceptible to a cognitive critique, it is the result of a fallible judgement, an impossible attribution.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See Burke's "Introduction on Taste", *Enquiry*, p. 25, in which the consciousness of having purged oneself of error yields a merely indirect, non-aesthetic pleasure:

the judgement is for the greater part employed in throwing stumbling blocks in the way of the imagination, in dissipating the scenes of its enchantment, and in tying us down to the disagreeable yoke of reason: for almost the only pleasure that men have in judging better than others, consists in a sort of conscious pride and superiority, which arises from thinking rightly; but then, this is an indirect pleasure, a pleasure which does not immediately result from the object which is under contemplation.

Thus in Burke's example from the *Iliad* the mixed surprise and terror which envelops the fugitive and spectators alike does not conform to the model of controlled and controlling identifications. It cannot be definitively located in a separate consciousness. Instead it manifests uncontrolled or involuntary involvement, modes of implication in the sublime: an ecstasy or rapture which takes us unawares and transports us beyond the circle of the familiar, the domestic or the identifiable without prospect of a decisive recuperation. In the same way anachronism or analepsis, whether deprecated as "unscholarly" (Weiskel on Pope and Burke) or as narrowly "scholarly" (Ferguson on de Man) is one facet of, one mode of implication in the sublime and all that it presumes. It is the untimely, that with which we are struck, imprinted or marked; a "passion" by which we are possessed without our yet possessing it.

The inhabitants of the rich man's house are confronted by a particularly striking, perhaps appalling enigma whose strangeness cannot be resolved by dialogue (that is, via hermeneutics), which cannot be domesticated. Because of his madness the stranger is an enigma also to himself, raising questions about the attribution of responsibility, the nature of the human attributes of self and of agency, and of their relation to the divine or non-human.

The submission to a violent but similar, recognisable masculine authority is necessitated by the challenge represented by the feminine, the false double, to self-identification and so to reason. This cathartic homeopathy is the prelude to the sublimations of aggressive homosociality, to identifications, and to significations. It is directed against a henceforth concealed or suppressed commerce between masculine and feminine, against the covert dissolution of Burkean hierarchies. Gender identifications in the *Enquiry* comprise a

hierarchical series of tropes, of devices for averting, but not from death, at term which belongs to the lexicon of the sublime. Both beauty and sublimity, and with them the mechanisms of sublimation and symbolisation are "shell games"; they are derivatives and concealments of indifference (of differences which do not signify), of an inscrutable, disorganic drifting or decomposition, a deficiency which is "nature" denatured, a "norm" from which it is normal to deviate in as much as it is already deviance, it already encroaches upon disorder. It is accordingly the indispensable median point through which each of the acknowledged genders of aesthetic experience is related to the other, the insistence of which motivates the deployment of both. Indifference is the motif in relation to which their opposition and combination, their circulation in the discourse of the *Enquiry* is effected and a "philosophical" aesthetic theory becomes possible. Like verbal description it is, for Burke, of no interest in itself, being apparently unpoetic, un- or anaesthetic, and unpolitical. But this merely serves to mask its dangerous incapacity to provide a functional norm on the basis of which to adjudicate the claims and counterclaims of fractious, dissenting viewpoints - or genders. More generally, the text as such emerges as incapable of legislating over its readings, of justifying the discrimination of legitimate from erroneous or inappropriate interpretations, since each deviation is capable of figuring as a mode of being implicated in the more original and incorrigible deviance which defines the "text" as a structurally motivated episode in a secondary narrative of reading and writing.

"SUCH A PERVERTED MIND": REVOLUTION AS SPECTRE AND AS SPECTACLE

The full title of Burke's major contribution to political thought is *Reflections on the revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event, in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris*. Its notional addressee was a young Frenchman named Depont (or de Pont), a friend of Burke's and an enthusiast for the revolution, who had written in November 1789 to the former apologist for the American cause in the expectation of receiving his approbation for that opinion.¹ Instead, this letter from a friend has two closely related aims. Its first object is to reject the application of what are described variously as "metaphysical", "abstract", "speculative" or "geometric" modes of reasoning to practical political questions. Its second, more specific aim is to provide a refutation of and an alternative to social contract theory in its most accepted post-Lockean forms, with the conclusion drawn from it of a right residing in the people of "cashiering kings for misconduct".² (This last was done notably by the dissenting minister Dr. Richard Price in his sermon of 4th of November, 1789, to the Revolution Society, which became Burke's foil in the *Reflections*.) More generally, the letter could be described as intending to interrupt a dangerous process of speculative derivation, of critical scrutiny of the origins of political authority,

¹ Depont was horrified by the result of his request, notifying Burke that "if I had at that time known your opinions, so far from begging you to express them, I should have besought you not to make them public". See Locke, p. 43.

² This expression, of which we hear much in the *Reflections*, originated with Andrew Kippis, Godwin's editor and formerly his tutor, in an address to the Revolution Society in 1788, to be taken up by Price the following year. See Locke, p. 42.

and as setting a limit to speculation and criticism by establishing that authority on grounds which would be unassailable by these means.

The *Reflections* has its own analogue of the "gothic cathedral" passage in that other letter which interrupts the transcendental deduction in *Biographia* XIII. This is likewise characterised by strange reversals and a marvellous because obscurely meaningful disorder:

All circumstances taken together, the French revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world. The most wonderful things are brought about in many instances by means the most absurd and ridiculous; in the most ridiculous modes; and apparently, by the most contemptible instruments. Every thing seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies. In viewing this monstrous tragi-comic scene, the most opposite passions necessarily succeed, and sometimes mix with each other in the mind; alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror.³

The astonishment and fascination, the revolution in the mind which is occasioned by this promiscuous mixing and chaotic succession will find its response in the totality of the *Reflections*, which is a protracted attempt to gloss this passage, to interpret the nature of this revolution.⁴

³ *Reflections*, pp. 243-4.

⁴ This effort is one to which the revolutionary rupture of accepted social and discursive forms committed revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike in newly explicit ways. See Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and London 1984) p. 74:

Verbal explanation was essential because the symbolic framework of the Revolution required constant clarification. Revolutionary political culture was by nature continually in flux; the mythic present was always being updated . . . In the fluid political situation of the Revolution, the "normal" uncertainty involved in reading images and symbols was exacerbated, and as a consequence verbal texts seemed all the more necessary as supplements. The speeches, the banners, and the inscriptions directed the attention of the participants and spectators; they repressed unwanted readings and elicited "correct" ones. In addition the speeches and the texts ensured the continuity of revolutionary experience. Although offices changed hands repeatedly . . . and many

According to Ronald Paulson, Burke was the first important British writer to use the word "revolution" in the radical French sense which would refer to a total transformation of social relations, as opposed both to political reform and to notions of cyclical continuity.

The basic struggle over the word *revolution* came in the seventeenth century with its trial revolutions/rebellions, each in its way a rehearsal for the great one a century later. The conflict lay between the strictly astronomical sense of repetition, a full circle [as in the recurrence of monarchical, aristocratic and democratic forms of government found in Vico], and the sense of a single *revolution* as an overthrow, a half-circle, a disruption, and so an irreversible change. Already in Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704), a book about forms of mental, political, religious, and social subversion, the word *revolution* is used to refer to an enthusiast's overturning of his brain or of the state . . .⁵

Burke actually employs both of these senses in the *Reflections*, the newer one in referring to the events in France, and the older in relation to the progressive nature of the English constitution. Thus he affirms that "the inheritable principle survived with a sort of immortality through all transmigrations - *multosque per annos stat fortuna domus et avi numerantur avorum*. This is the spirit of our constitution, not only in its settled course, but in all its revolutions".⁶ Clearly a certain ambiguity arises in this

symbols were altered, the principles of interpretation remained much the same.

In this sense both parties may be viewed as the captives of a single "revolutionary" problematic, although in the case of the revolutionaries Hunt points to "a tension between transparency and didacticism" (p.73), "republicans had to teach the people how to read the new symbolic text of revolution" (p. 68). Revolutionary signification was allegorical rather than symbolic in the Coleridgean sense, and frequently involved personification - of Nature, Liberty, Reason, the People etc., partly because it was new and constantly renewing itself: it was not around long enough to be naturalised. In addition the abstract universalism of allegory^W was not tied to the body of the king, as opposed to symbolic opacity; it was not habituated to traditional postures of submission.

⁵ R. Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven and London 1983) p. 50.

⁶ *Reflections*, p. 260.

schematisation, which Burke will not be able to avoid, since one person's social apocalypse (half-circle) may be a constitutive moment in another's progressive dialectic (full circle).

In addition, Burke pointedly retains the old concept of "constitution", disallowing Paine's revolutionary sense of a unique foundational document enunciating principles, or self-evident natural rights, and the conclusions drawn from them deductively.⁷ For Paine such a document would approximate to a transparent and self-consistent codification, an adequate theory of societal relations which would be actualised by revolutionary means. In Burke's view the British "constitution", like any other worthy of the name, is a comprehensive implied or immanent order which is presupposed by the continuous social and political work of reaffirming legitimacy, of separating, selecting, adjudicating and prescribing. It is the totality of a pre-existing "system" which envelops what consequently becomes legible in social experience as enactments, or instantiations of this invisible *form* of meaningfulness. In its most general sense it includes the form of what *is*, and of whatever *can be* a component of the social, of what can be meaningful. The constitution is the way in which things are constituted, ultimately by divine fiat. It is "an expression of the Logos".⁸ In normal circumstances the social world assumed by all our experience is perceived only in relation to the "fading" of this systematic ground into insignificance. Thus the constitution comprises no single document, but is the necessary principle of all documentation; it has no unique beginning in the world, since it is through it that a world of social experience begins.

Civil society is accordingly severed from nature, is a fiction:

The idea of a people . . . is wholly artificial; and made, like all other legal fictions, by common agreement. What

⁷ S. Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: The French Revolution as Linguistic Event* (Hanover and London 1988) pp. 10-1.

⁸ Blakemore, p. 16.

the particular nature of that agreement was, is collected from the form into which the particular society has been cast.⁹

If civil society be the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law . . . Every sort of legislative judicial, or executive power are [*sic*] its creatures. They can have no being in any other state of things; and how can any man claim, under the conventions of civil society, rights which do not so much as suppose its existence?¹⁰

The severance of the law and the state from nature, from natural rights, is the condition of the constitution of civil society,¹¹ but the discontinuity is compensated for by "philosophic analogy":

Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete.¹²

This naturalism, to the extent that it refers to organic processes, is not substantial but is metaphorical and illustrative. Burke is wary of the effects of metaphor in relation to theoretical knowledge for reasons which should already be clear, and is careful to emphasise elsewhere that "These analogies between bodies natural and politic, though they may sometimes illustrate

⁹ *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), Works iv, p. 169.

¹⁰ Burke, *Reflections* p. 309.

¹¹ Burke's point is not that there are no such things as "natural rights" given that "Art is man's nature" and that this art is overseen by divine providence. Rather he wishes to assert the unworkable character of social models based on "natural" individual humans which are not socially constituted, on an atomistic conception of pre-social but complete, autonomous individuals. For a sensible discussion of this question see R. R. Fennessey, *Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man: a Difference of Political Opinion* (The Hague 1963) pp. 139-41.

¹² Burke, *Reflections* p. 275.

arguments, furnish no argument of themselves", that "Parallels of this sort rather furnish similitudes to illustrate or to adorn than to supply analogies from whence to reason".¹³ The analogy is in fact, as the above passage goes on to explain, between the state, presided over by an hereditary monarchy, and the patriarchal family.¹⁴ It has a functional or practical rather than a cognitive justification.

In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars.¹⁵

It is imagery, primarily metaphor, which binds up in mutual reflection the beautiful fiction of a people by transporting particular, familial affections in the direction of general laws, connecting the species-life to social institutions. Whereas organic metaphors provide from a theoretical viewpoint

¹³ Burke, *A Letter to William Elliot, Works* v, p. 124 and *Regicide Peace, Works* v, p. 234. For a fuller discussion see W. D. Love, "Edmund Burke's Idea of the Body Corporate: a Study in Imagery" *Review of Politics* 27 (1965) 184-97, and also F. A. Dreyer, *Burke's Politics: a Study in Whig Orthodoxy* (Waterloo 1979) pp. 77-8. Turner, p. 48, makes a contrary point with reference to a passage in which the young Burke states that "Arguments concerning the Nature of any being can only be taken from the Investigation of its Properties and the Analogy they bear to each other" (H. V. F. Somerset ed. *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke* (Cambridge 1957) p. 45). But analogy here appears to refer to relationships obtaining within a single entity considered as a system of those relationships for the purpose of arguing or reasoning about it. The organic analogy in the *Reflections* flirts with a further assimilation of this unavoidable systematising conferred by language to the spontaneity of other types of systems with which it is not continuous. It involves naturalising what are nothing other than social fictions, if also "true" ones. The assertion that "Art is man's nature" is a paradox which Burke is unwilling to resolve by means of a whole-hearted naturalism or by a rationalist or empiricist mechanisation. He would have regarded them as the two faces of social and political subversion.

¹⁴ This is, of course a commonplace of royalist ideology in England and elsewhere. This topic is treated in detail in relation to the *Reflections* by Blakemore, pp. 31-60.

¹⁵ *Reflections*, p. 275.

mere "illustration" and are unreliable, metaphor is generally an indispensable organising principle, a deceit woven into the fabric of things which defines art as natural, as constitutive.¹⁶

The constitution comprises a real, potentially immortal body politic, which unites the visible to the invisible, ultimately divine world. Burke's society is a partially secularised avatar of the *corpus mysticum*¹⁷ in which the constitution, a pure form or matrix everywhere implied in social existence, affirms itself via its own historical inscription. History is the process of this self-affirmation, is intrinsically sacramental. Since the British constitution is one instance of these conditions of any intelligibility and legality whatever it is to this extent "natural", or universal and necessary. History is a series of transitory moments which are occasions of the instantiation of intelligible form. It is itself "a permanent body composed of transitory parts".

Coleridge's utopianism as outlined in 1795 envisaged an exchange of masculine identities approaching to simultaneity and so approximating to the image of eternity, of God the Father and father of himself. Aspheterisation, comparable in significant respects to Burke's indifference, involved the idealising reduction of history, and a partial assimilation of women as the bearers or mediators of history to an undifferentiated medium of that simultaneity. The result was to have been to render the visible as the mirror of the invisible world, to institute the worldly apocalypse of pantisocracy, and so, as far as possible, to accomplish the single great metaphor of the world as truth.

¹⁶ Burke's favourite metaphor for this facet of metaphoricity in general is that of clothing or dress, indicating a socially desirable but highly ambivalent and expressive mode of concealment.

¹⁷ A useful history of the development of the metaphor of the "social body" in relation to medieval Christian theology is to be found in E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton 1957). The relevance of this work to the study of Burke is urged in Blakemore, pp. 14-8.

By contrast in Burke's political theory the exchange of persons functions as perpetuation within secular, although redeemed, time. The related concepts of linear history and of metaphor as deceit or concealment, are constitutive. Where the young Coleridge would have realised metaphor as truth, Burke would establish discontinuity as the sublime truth of metaphor. The visible does not imitate the invisible world, it implies or presupposes it. A history and a people are engendered when social experience is deciphered as if it were an instantiation of universal values. The unreliability of metaphor, which figures in the *Enquiry* in terms of the degenerative character of indifference, necessitates both the temporal and structural differentiation, the attribution of a history and the affirmation of a hierarchy or class system - the political sublime - which constitutes a people, much as in the earlier text it had required the production of an aesthetic. In doing so it makes the condition of meaningfulness the subordination of what was or will be to that which is constituted as what is. This is the price of Burke's alternative to rationalist revolutionism, of his project for neutralising the sheer randomness and diversity of history from within.

Such is Burke's crucial application of the legal concept of prescription, of the principle that possession, having perpetuated itself over a period of time, amounts to "the most solid of all titles, not only to property, but, which is to secure that property, to government".¹⁸ The temporal, we might say narrative or narratable origins of authority are necessarily indeterminate because in practice it is impossible to fix a point of origin, but this is irrelevant for Burke, since even the product of "*old violence*", if it maintains itself, "is consecrated by time and becomes lawful".¹⁹ Time distances, sublimates and

¹⁸ Burke, *Speech on Reform of Representation*, Works vi, p. 146.

¹⁹ Burke, Letter to Captain Thomas Mercer, 26th February 1790 in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. T. W. Copeland et al. (Cambridge 1958-78) vol. vi, p. 45.

beautifies violence, and in doing so legitimates it. The crucial question becomes that of whether the actions which institute a new government may be assimilated to an existing metaphoric structure in such a way that they might be construed as veritable instantiations of the constitution, and so would license us to "anticipate the time of prescription".²⁰

Similarly, Burke argues in defiance of the tradition of enlightened critique that prejudices can usually be demonstrated to be the repositories of a collective "latent wisdom", that they are more reliable and more efficacious than rational judgement. Because "We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason" the English cherish their prejudices, which are the "coat" of reason:

Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.²¹

Of course, the type of emergency under discussion is just such as would lend itself to such puzzlement and irresolution:

The question of . . . 'cashiering kings', will always be, as it has always been, an extraordinary question of state, and wholly out of the law; a question (like all other questions of state) of dispositions, and of means, and of probable consequences, rather than of positive rights . . . The speculative line of demarcation, where obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin, is faint, obscure, and not easily definable.²²

²⁰ It should go without saying that while Burke has a practical politician's eye to utility he is in no way a utilitarian, any more than because he accepts consent as a criterion of legitimacy (weaker, of course, than prescription) he should be considered a contract theorist in the accepted sense.

²¹ *Reflections*, p. 347.

²² *Reflections*, p. 271.

Questions of state, those which pertain to constitutionality and to politics, are, *per se*, "wholly outside the law" to the extent that they concern the possibility of laws, the assumed matrix for the enunciation of juridical discourses and prejudices alike.²³ In their highest form they require an *art* of statecraft involving a deliberation which accordingly is not subject to theoretical prescription:

The pretended rights of these [revolutionary] theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of *middle*, incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned. The rights of men in government are their advantages; and these are often in balance between differences of good; in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes, between evil and evil.²⁴

The "speculative line" is here multiple or impure, it shapes no definite contour, no simple limit. This is a sphere not determinable by speculation, by reason alone, but involves at best a calculus of the differences of empirical forces as well as of comparative degrees of good and evil. Yet neither can the deliberation be merely empirical, since "The science of government . . . requires . . . even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however sagacious and observing he may be".²⁵ Fortunately, even in extraordinary cases, it transpires that the treatment is in effect a non-simple reflex of the disorder which occasioned it:

the nature of the disease is to indicate the remedy to those whom nature has qualified to administer in extremities this critical, ambiguous, bitter portion to a distempered

²³ One effect of Burke's argument in this connection is to erode the distinction between judgement and prejudice. Judgement only maintains itself by means of a normally forgotten or concealed appeal to prejudice, in the same way that legitimacy is ultimately dependent on prescription.

²⁴ *Reflections*, p.313.

²⁵ *Reflections*, p. 312. Here Burke is probably drawing on David Hume's work in epistemology, as elsewhere in the *Reflections* he may have in mind Hume's critique of the concept of natural rights.

state. Times and occasions, and provocations, will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case; the irritable from sensibility to oppression; the high-minded from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands; the brave and bold from the love of honourable danger in a generous cause; but, with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good.²⁶

The required operation is here translated from a strict logical-juridical to a medical²⁷ and pedagogical, ultimately a hermeneutic model. History for Burke is inscription, the auto-inscription and so the incarnation of a spiritual body. It is the object of the same type of reverent attention in this connection as texts more narrowly understood: "If you are desirous of knowing the spirit of our constitution . . . pray look . . . in our histories, in our records, in our acts of parliament, in our journals of parliament".²⁸ Disorder is a component of such a text in which the principle of its amendment is to be read by a complex determination, in accordance with a latent but still legible order. This immanent order becomes legible, becomes an object of consciousness for "the thinking and the good", primarily through disorder, in times of crisis when we are "alarmed into reflexion".²⁹ Fortunately "It is far from impossible to reconcile, if we do not suffer ourselves to be entangled in the mazes of metaphysic sophistry, the use both of a fixed rule and an occasional deviation"³⁰.

²⁶ *Reflections*, p. 271.

²⁷ The *Foxite Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, in its edition of 4th November 1790, adopted Burke's medical metaphors in order to present a satiric distillation of the *Reflections* in the form of a doctor's prescription: "Essent. sublimat. dominat Monarchic . . . Infunde Spir. Aristocrat. . . . Adde: Garrulitas, etc." See Fennessey, p. 184.

²⁸ *Reflections*, p. 271. Hence the value, for Burke, of the claim (p. 276) that: our liberty . . . carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences and titles.

²⁹ *Reflections*, p. 337.

³⁰ *Reflections*, p. 256.

Thus in connection with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 Burke argues that the rule requires the deviation to preserve itself, much as the indifferent body must at some point be worked or goaded: "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished most religiously to preserve".³¹ This is because the rule is not to be thought of as mirroring a real or a possible world, as being susceptible of any direct realisation or application, any more than it is possible to read a poem by visualising its imagery. The speculative line is impure because the metaphoricity which constitutes the rule, which relates it to its instances or examples, is essentially discontinuous. The idea of the rule is internally incoherent, is already deviant, so is in need of a supplementary, corrective deviation. In the *Reflections* and elsewhere Burke often writes as if such social upheavals as are discussed are contingent upon particular abuses and are no intrinsic part of the constitution of society. But whereas overt and massive social upheavals are, like all questions of state, resolutions found ^{by means of} to a process of factoring an immense, indeed an illimitable diversity of empirical elements, revolution is at all times immanent to the constitution because that which constitutes in the constitution is metaphorical discontinuity. Revolutions of one sort or another are endemic to the system, and another name for this benign concept of revolution is reproduction. Upon this recognition Burke, with some justification, pins his claim to advance a progressive conservatism which would stress combining the process of social reproduction with the maximum flexibility compatible with the preservation of order and legitimacy.

In discriminating between that concept of revolution and the contemporary French experience as Burke wishes to do (the more so since Dr. Price had obligingly asserted the similarity of the principles of the two in his

³¹ *Reflections*, p. 259.

sermon), the question becomes one of distinguishing between the true sublime which reveals the antecedent ground of the rule, and so confirms or reproduces the rule in breaching it (a definition equally applicable to the Longinian and the Burkean sublimines), and the false sublime which is in fundamental conflict with any legality or intelligibility whatever.

The redemptive cycle which organises much of Burke's polemic makes its beginning in a state in which

the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity . . . appears to me to be the result of profound reflection; or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. ³²

But this earthly paradise of unreflected wisdom, like the Whig dominance of parliament, does not continue: for reasons already discussed it seems to breed bad habits, almost a societal hypochondria or addiction.

I never liked this continual talk of resistance and revolution, or the practice of making the extreme medicine of the constitution its daily bread. It renders the habit of society dangerously valetudinary: it is taking periodic doses of mercury sublimite, and swallowing down repeated provocatives of cantharides to our love of Liberty.

This distemper of remedy, grown habitual, relaxes and wears out, by a vulgar and prostituted use, the spring of that spirit which is to be exerted on great occasions. It was in the most patient period of Roman servitude that themes of tyrannicide were made the ordinary exercise of boys at school - *cum perimit sævos classis numerosa tyrannos*. ["while the numerous class is slaying the cruel tyrants"]³³

³² *Reflections*, p. 274.

³³ *Reflections*, p. 314. The quotation, referring to instruction in rhetoric, is from Juvenal, *Satires* VII, l. 151. Burke appears to suggest here that the trouble is caused by the continual and extreme talk of bad or misguided men, but since they merely actualise a constitutive moment of social reproduction their actions are to that extent prescribed. See also *Reflections*, p. 459:

Cicero ludicrously describes Cato as endeavouring to act in the commonwealth upon the school paradoxes which

The sublimity of patriarchal legitimacy based on "old violence" becomes degraded and vulgarised by repetition and by habituation; as Ferguson pointed out, the sublime is a constitutionally endangered species. The danger is manifest when imprudent or premature intercourse on the part of pedagogues like Dr. Price transfers the theme into the hands of "the numerous class", of schoolboyish subjection to a pedantic and fruitless literalism associated with the merely formal character of the exercise. Such a levelling of great with ordinary occasions is marked by an exhausted regression to an implicitly masturbatory submissiveness, a dissociation of means from ends allied to an uneconomic automatism of repetition.

This in turn yields, in some at least, a vitiated "moral taste"³⁴ for revolution as a false sublime, the symptom of the illness posing as the cure of the indifferent social body:

Plots, massacres, assassinations, seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouse the imagination, grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years security, and the still unanimating repose of public prosperity.³⁵

To this Burke opposes an educated taste, in a passage which, although well-known, merits quotation at length:

exercised the wits of the junior students in the stoic philosophy. If this was true of Cato, these gentlemen [i.e. revolutionists] copy after him in the manner of some persons who lived about his time - *pede nudo Cato*.

(This last refers to Horace, *Epistles* I, xix, ll. 12-4, trans. C. C. O'Brien, in Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. C. C. O'Brien (Harmondsworth 1968) p. 394: "If someone looks fierce and goes round in bare feet and poor clothes to be like Cato, does he really display the virtue and morality of Cato?" The other translations from the *Reflections* in this chapter are O'Brien's.)

³⁴ *Reflections*, p. 320.

³⁵ *Reflections*, p. 317.

Why do I feel so differently from the Reverend Dr Price, and those of his lay flock, who will choose to adopt the sentiments of his discourse? - For this plain reason - because it is *natural* I should; because we are so made as to be affected at such spectacles with melancholy sentiments upon the unstable condition of mortal prosperity, and the tremendous uncertainty of human greatness; because in those natural feelings we learn great lessons; because in events like these our passions instruct our reason: because when kings are hurl'd from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama, and become the objects of insult to the base, and of pity to the good, we behold such disasters in the moral, as we would behold a miracle in the physical order of things. We are alarmed into reflexion; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity; our weak unthinking pride is humbled, under the dispensations of a mysterious wisdom. - Some tears might be drawn from me, if such a spectacle were exhibited on the stage. I should be truly ashamed of finding in myself that superficial, theatric sense of painted distress, whilst I could exult over it in real life. With such a perverted mind, I could never venture to show my face at a tragedy. People would think the tears that Garrick formerly, or that Siddons not long since, have extorted from me, were the tears of hypocrisy; I should know them to be the tears of folly.³⁶

Burke offers an alternative scene of instruction, one which he argues qualifies him to displace Dr. Price, the false teacher. Here the lesson to be learned from the downfall of kings is that which is appropriate to the true sublime: that of mortality, of the instability and the uncertainty of merely human greatness. But this is itself a "great lesson". Far from being eroded, human greatness, by means of a familiar dialectic, is preserved in the form of knowledge of negativity. For both schools of reading the revolution is depicted as a representation or spectacle, a concatenation of theatrical effects or a rhetoric. But what would satisfy a mere craving for intense sensation, a cure for degenerative anaesthesia on the part of the one which would believe itself the author of the events and which realises or literalises its murderous fantasy in a frenzy of self-stimulation, on the part of the other implies a "Supreme Director" upon whom is displaced the problematics of authorship. Perhaps it is

³⁶ *Reflections*, pp. 337-8.

more accurate to say that this problematic seems to disappear in such a scenario along with authorship, since we are left with actors, an audience and a director only. It is at the moment of authoritative interpretation and of pedagogical efficacy that the strictly textual function and disfunction of the author fades, at the point where it is projected as the inauguration of an invisible, purely immanent constitution.

According to Thomas Weiskel,

The true function of the sublime is to legitimate the necessary discontinuities in the classical scheme of signification and to justify the specific affective experience which these discontinuities entailed . . . The 'difficulty' so central in Burke, Kant and others is the affective correlative of a semiotic discontinuity in the inexplicable passage between one order or discourse and another.³⁷

Or, as the issue was formulated at one point by Burke: "In France you are now in the crisis of a revolution, and in the transit from one form of government to another".³⁸ Sublimity concerns mediations, transitions, the "in between" or gaps aligned with death and with desire which Burke observes to be as affectively loaded as they are cognitively troublesome. The constitution is the invisible articulation of a paternal fiat, the spirit of which in "good" revolutions migrates between orders organised metaphorically (which for Burke means discontinuously), as its repetitions or translations, its quotations and appropriations. By contrast in 1795 Coleridge celebrated a projected millennial collapse of reading into seeing by means of a repeated erasure of history, to yield a mirroring of the paternal countenance on the part of the social body. Coleridge aspired to commence as he would continue, to overleap the problematic of

³⁷ Weiskel, p. 17.

³⁸ *Reflections*, p. 316.

transition, the Godwin/Robespierre dilemma, by means of the fiction of the new beginning on the banks of the Susquehanna.

But both seek to limit the feminine, and to limit women, to regular modes of cohabitation within single, self-consistent orders (to an *oikos*, and an economy). The hiatus between orders - itself an ontological structure under the sway of imagery which is temporal for Burke and spatial for Coleridge - could then be filled by and would offer no impediment to the paternal Word. It has been suggested that in France the Girondin icon of the pacific, bountiful and feminine figure of Liberty served a purpose of masking the exercise of revolutionary violence and the political volatility which preceded the founding of the Republic in 1792, but that in the efforts to consolidate a new order she was displaced, due to the labours of David and the Jacobins, by the sublime effigy of Hercules.³⁹

³⁹ L. Hunt, "Engraving the Republic", *History Today* 30 (1980), 11-17, and "The Political Psychology of Revolutionary Caricatures" (cited above). According to Hunt, in the revolutionary "family romance" Liberty figures as the daughter to be protected from paternal violence (if not violation) by her brother, Hercules, or the people militant. She stresses the abstract character of Liberty as a personification rather than a person like the king (as in Louis XIV's "*L'Etat, c'est moi*"), although she was also "ready to act in the world" ("Caricatures", p. 38).

This abstraction, again, did not exclude Liberty's symbolic actualisation in the form of a living woman instead of in that of the more conventional statue, as in the celebrated "Festival of Reason" of November 1793. One newspaper explained that "vulgar minds might have misunderstood" an inanimate image of liberty and reverted to an idolatry reminiscent of Catholicism. By contrast "this living woman, despite all the charms that embellished her, could not be deified by the ignorant, as would a statue of stone". "Something which we must never tire of saying to the people is that liberty, reason, truth are only abstract beings. These are not gods, for properly speaking, they are parts of ourselves" (*Les Révolutions de paris* no. 215, 23-30 brumaire an II, vol. 17, quoted in Hunt, *Politics*, pp. 64-5). This literalism would accomplish a didactic naturalising and democratising reduction of the personification to the representative person. Therefore this elevation of the idealised "common woman" is intended to be read, as it were, in the opposite direction to Burke's elevation of Marie Antoinette, whom he first saw "sixteen or seventeen years since . . . just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in" (*Reflections*, p. 169). After the Terror of 1793-4 and the attempts under Robespierre to actualise one radical form of participatory democracy, a concern of the administrators of the new order became to ensure that "the lines between the people and their representatives . . . be more clearly drawn" (p. 85).

It might be added that in London in 1768 a young girl was paraded in a cart,

Observations of this type are sufficient to raise the question of "loose", superfluous or misplaced women, of strays and especially of the disaffected, in connection with the counter-revolutionary polemics, such as Burke's, aimed at unmasking revolutionary discontinuity.

In the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* of 1796 Burke causes the ubiquitous image (if that is the proper word) of Milton's Death to undergo a strange mutation:

out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man. Going straight forward to its end, unappalled by peril, unchecked by remorse, despising all common maxims and all common means, that hideous phantom overpowered those who could not believe it was possible she could at all exist . . . ⁴⁰

It is as if the incestuous son, certainly, but also the incestuous father of the Miltonic encounter had been subsumed or perhaps devoured by the ambivalent mother/ lover/daughter figure of Sin. Again, it is as if the requirement for "a grand spectacle" of violence and death "to rouze the imagination", to animate and empower an immature and defective will, had issued immediately in disempowerment, in imaginative collapse. Ronald Paulson identifies in this feminisation an indication of a movement "downward and backward into undifferentiation of the sexes as well as of the ruler and ruled, the

with 'Liberty' inscribed on her brow, to the accompaniment of cries of 'Long live Wilkes'. Three inscriptions in the form of medals suspended on her chest and sides bore the following legends: Charles I, crowned 1625, beheaded 1649; James II, crowned 1685, exiled 1688; George III, crowned 1760 . . .

(Noted in M. Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism* (Cambridge 1979) p. 14.)

⁴⁰ *Regicide Peace*, p. 237.

hunter and hunted, and the eater and eaten".⁴¹ But to establish more precisely the role of this type of "feminisation" and its relation to a thematics of sexual "undifferentiation" it is necessary to examine aspects of the contribution which sexual differentiation makes to the politics of the *Reflections*.

Burke's case turns on the claim that "Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and the invisible world".⁴² This link, which enlightenment revolutionism would destroy, is represented in the consciously idealised and sentimentalised figure of Marie Antoinette. Its components are personification, a particular institutionalisation of sexual difference, and the co-implication of the aesthetic and ethical spheres. Burke has been explaining the manner in which the European institution of chivalry mitigated distinctions, and "subdued the fierceness of pride and power", "without confounding ranks". It was the artifice which made a society possible by mediating the relation between sublimity and beauty, and between men and women.

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonised the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the

⁴¹ Paulson, p. 73. That is, he views it in terms of a regression, along conventional Freudian lines and so according a primary determining function to the Oedipal structure, in the direction of infantile auto-eroticism. It should be noted that in 1801 the *Anti-Jacobin Review* published an anonymous poem in which Wollstonecraft and Godwin were depicted as exchanging sexual identities. See J. M. Todd's introduction to her edition of M. Wollstonecraft, *A Wollstonecraft Anthology* (Bloomington 1977) p. 17, quoted in Blakemore, p. 55.

⁴² *Reflections*, p. 321.

defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order . . .

On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which . . . is destitute of all taste and elegance, laws are to be supported only by their own terrors, and by the concern, which each individual may find in them, from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private interests. In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows. Nothing is left which engages the affections on the part of the commonwealth. On the principles of this mechanic philosophy, our institutions can never be embodied, if I may use the expression, in persons; so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment . . . These public affections, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to the law. The precept given by a wise man, as well as a great critic, for the construction of poems, is equally true as to states. *Non satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunt* . . . To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely.⁴³

The link between the visible and invisible worlds is embodied pre-eminently in a feminine personification which clothes and so conceals the order of authority and legality, and the accompanying defects, of which social institutions are comprised. The "pleasing illusions" with which the moral imagination clothes "the defects of our naked shivering nature" in which laws are without visible support and so are thrown back on "their own terrors" find their exemplum in the figure of the feminine body as the object at once of a threat which is implicitly sexual as well as mortal, and of a chivalrous sublimation. She is desired but untouched, and so is the screen on which it is possible to project the threat of revolutionary sexual violence.⁴⁴ Because her nakedness is

⁴³ *Reflections*, pp. 332-4. The quotation is from Horace, *De Arte Poetica* 99: "It is not enough for poems to be beautiful, they must charm".

⁴⁴ As in the symbolic stripping and rape of the queen by the mob (*Reflections*, p. 325), depicted with probable disregard for historical accuracy by Burke - there appears to be no evidence that she had to fly "almost naked" from her bedchamber (see Paulson, p. 60). Here the queen's nudity serves to clothe a more complex, a less easily represented occasion.

at once desired and chivalrously renounced her clothed body in turn serves to clothe, to conceal from itself an all too imperious, a defective masculine and constitutionalist desire, the excess of which is at once represented and mastered in its chivalrous traversal of the feminine body. Like poems and like states, which last are the institutionalisations of a people,⁴⁵ women should be both beautiful and enticing embodiments; they are "aids to the law" in as much as they are "pleasing illusions" which protect the law, and masculine desire, from itself, from its own terrorism.

At this level of the argument Burke is able to depict the revolution as the despoliation by unscrupulous, unattached or unpropertied males of a father's and husband's property in his women, and so a threat to inheritance by primogeniture - inheritance by selective disinheritance - and to the more general process of securing and passing on an intact name.⁴⁶ Terror directed toward women is a constitutive moment in the derivation of political authority in that through it the link between the visible and invisible worlds is forged or represented. The constitution *is* this linking, the negotiation of a union (not least a hierarchical union between two opposed sexes), the determination of an undefinable middle, on traditional, conventional, or prejudicial terms, "which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place", and so makes possible the construction of a world. Similarly personification is internal

⁴⁵ See Fennessey, p. 115: Whereas social contract theory tends to locate the state in particular institutions and so to distinguish it from civil society generally, "Burke's method . . . takes as its immediate object the total existing society . . . This complex reality, considered as organised under government, is the state. The state therefore includes every aspect of human life". Rousseau's concept of the "general will" exhibits a comparable totalising and implicitly totalitarian tendency.

⁴⁶ See Paulson, (pp. 61-2) for a discussion of Burke's conception of revolution as the destructive liberation of masculine appetite, and also Blakemore's characterisation (pp. 43-4) of Burke's thematics of male sexual exploitation. There is a good deal in the *Reflections* about the subversion of aristocratic feminine virtue by parvenu (bourgeois or marginal) males, in effect reversing the radical's charge of dissoluteness against the aristocracy and in particular against aristocratic women - notably Marie Antoinette.

("natural") and indispensable to the process of socialisation. Burke and Rousseau agree that becoming a person is a conventional, artificial and social process, but here certain personifications in particular are called upon to symbolise or personify personification as such, to embody the value and necessity of the social. The transition from feeling to thinking (as practical determination rather than as speculation), or from aesthetics to ethics or politics, is prescribed by the recognition of the participation of fiction and of desire in the construction of social reality.

However, ~~their~~^{there} remains at least one other relevant aspect of the argument, signalled by the transsexualism of the formerly Miltonic spectre, which offers a superficially contrary thematisation. This is how Burke depicts the consequences of imaginative and political collapse:

France has not sacrificed her virtue to her interest; but she has abandoned her interest, that she might prostitute her virtue . . . All other people have laid the foundations of civil freedom in severer manners, and in a system of a more austere and masculine morality. France, when she let loose the reins of regal authority, doubled the licence, of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners, and of an insolent irreligion in opinions and practices; and has extended through all ranks of life . . . all the unhappy corruptions that usually were the disease of wealth and power. This is one of the new principles of equality in France.⁴⁷

France has become a whore, but this is a whoredom abstracted from the system, from the mitigating forms of economic intelligibility and determination, and so from the orderly cycle of production and reproduction within which she might function as an aid or supplement to marriage. She is a whore who does not even care to get a good price.⁴⁸ Instead there is a collapse of

⁴⁷ *Reflections*, pp. 280.

⁴⁸ In the *Reflections* Burke is much concerned with France's economic collapse, and in particular with inflation (a "swelling" comparable to that of the false sublime) as a consequence of too prolific a printing of money. Also at stake in this general process is the value, the price, of a name ("Price"). In one memorable passage the operation of "the great machine, or paper-mill, of their fictitious wealth" (p. 392) produces (p. 486),

values to effect not an exchange of goods but an unrestrained profligacy, an uncompensated outgoing of interest and of virtue. Likewise, to those of the numerous class, the insurrectionary mob who consort with her without having acquired property rights in her she will communicate the diseases, but not the virtues, of wealth and power. The "ranks of life" are, in this scenario, the principles of economy and of compensation, of "masculine austerity", which fit advantages to corresponding defects. They comprise "all that combination, and all that opposition of interests . . . that action and counteraction which, in the natural and in the political world, from the reciprocal struggle of discordant powers, draws out the harmony of the universe".⁴⁹ Without these internal limits the operations of sublimation and of accumulation based on restraint which effect a stabilising disequilibrium of wealth and power will cease to be possible.⁵⁰ The result can only be an evacuation of value, a universal impoverishment.

Society requires that men's inclinations be thwarted and passions controlled by a power outside themselves,

But where popular authority is absolute and unrestrained, the people have an infinitely greater, because a far better founded confidence in their own

a process of continual transmutation of paper into land, and land into paper . . . by this kind of operation, that species of property becomes (as it were) volatilised; it assumes an unnatural and monstrous activity . . . and . . . has now acquired the worst and most pernicious part of the evil of a paper circulation, the greatest possible uncertainty in its value.

For an intelligent discussion of this aspect of the text see T. Furniss, "Burke, Paine, and the Language of Assignats" *ELH* 54 (2) Summer 1987, 54-70. Burke is characterised persuasively as a sympathiser with the new (capitalist) economics of Adam Smith who "yet seems to feel that the only way to maintain the conditions necessary for its success is to introduce it in disguise" (p. 69). It is clear that the rule which must cover its nakedness in order to preserve itself is, amongst other things, the rule of capitalist accumulation, which must be encumbered or limited by aristocratic prerogative.

⁴⁹ *Reflections*, p. 277.

⁵⁰ *Reflections*, p. 299: possessors of great hereditary wealth "are at the very worst, the ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth".

power. They are themselves, in a great measure, their own instruments. They are nearer to their objects. Besides, they are less under responsibility to one of the greatest controlling powers on earth, the sense of fame and estimation. The share of infamy that is likely to fall to the lot of each individual in public acts, is small indeed; the operation of opinion being in the inverse ratio to the number of those who abuse power. Their own approbation of their own acts has to them the appearance of a public judgement in their favour. A perfect democracy is therefore the most shameless thing in the world. As it is the most shameless it is also the most fearless. No man apprehends in his person he can be made subject to punishment. Certainly the people at large never ought: for as all punishments are for example towards the conservation of the people at large, the people at large can never become the subject of punishment by any human hand.* It is therefore of infinite importance that they should not be suffered to imagine that their will, any more than that of kings, is the standard of right and wrong.⁵¹

**Quicquid multis peccatur inultum.* [whatsoever offence is committed by many remains unpunished]

Democracy means lack of distance between agent and instrument or between subject and object. It means a lack of mediation through the hierarchisation of power, which is ultimately divine mediation provided by the constitution under which "all who administer in the government of men . . . stand in the person of God himself".⁵² Therefore there is no shame, no effective alterity, no ultimate, invisible Other as locus of the law, and so no divine scrutiny and judgement. But neither is there any sensation of guilt where there is no law due to a collapse of the structures of exemplification. In effect there is a disappearance of the legal fiction of agency: the law, according to Burke's hermeneutic model, becomes a message with neither sender or receiver - incomprehensible and irrelevant. The will of all would be as capricious and unaccountable as a force of nature.

⁵¹ *Reflections*, pp. 354-5. The quotation in Burke's note is from Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, l. 260 .

⁵² *Reflections*, p. 353.

This is the half-circle as interregnum or as interruption, as social dissolution. It is accordingly also the exhibiting of what should not be seen or represented,⁵³ what is interdicted by "moral taste": the false because "feminine" sublime. In the case of this "feminine" sublime the rule is breached but without thereby being confirmed, because that breaching reveals only an absence or lack of ground. The true sublime breaches the rule in order to preserve or restore it, because it embodies the wisdom which recognises that the beautiful symmetry implied by the rule is, by itself, insufficient or defective, and that therefore the rule alone is not enough. It acknowledges, if only implicitly, that sublimation and idealisation are required to provide something more, in the form of a logic of attribution. What distinguishes sublimity from puerility, the men from the boys, is also what distinguishes true from false pedagogues (the masters of "their academy") - the latter pedantically communicate only the naked rule, which, because it disperses what should be accumulated, degenerates into a mechanical and meaningless repetition, a sequence of "utopian" false starts. What for Coleridge in the "Lectures on Revealed Religion" was a saving hesitation on the verge of contamination by secular history resembles that which for Burke figures as the profitless repetition associated with social and semiotic

⁵³ An effective development of this point is offered by Neil Hertz in "Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria Under Political Pressure" in his *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York 1985) pp. 161-91. See also his reply to responses by Catherine Gallagher and Joel Fineman, both reproduced in the book, on pp. 206-15. The article, which is mainly concerned with recollections and interpretations of incidents from the Paris Commune, discusses the attempt to map a more overtly polemical distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" modes of interpretation against an oppositional, "natural" construction of sexual difference. It takes its departure from a posthumous fragment of Victor Hugo's in the collection entitled by his executors *Choses vues* ("Things Seen"). This describes, with a dubious historical accuracy reminiscent of that of Burke's symbolic stripping of the French queen, an incident which is presented by Hugo as revelatory of the character of the insurrection and of the opposition it encountered. It concerns two young, beautiful prostitutes who defied the National Guardsmen from the barricades of the communards at the expense of their lives by raising their skirts and exposing themselves to them.

disintegration. Both, however, would wish to distinguish their positions from the improper revelations of the "feminine" sublime.

Burke's objective in the *Reflections* is in a fundamental sense to trope the French revolution, to give it another interpretive half-turn by means of which Englishmen, once properly "alarmed into reflection", could be guided into an attributive recognition and reaffirmation of their own constitution. This is appropriate because revolution is the trope which figures the tropological as such, as either constitution or as catastrophe. Burke argues that the full circle presupposes, comprehends and neutralises the half-circle. He normalises the revolution in defining it as deviate; in arguing its irreconcilability he reconciles it, negatively, to the rule, but to this end he requires a sharp theoretical distinction between good (1688) and bad (1789), glorious and inglorious revolutions. The revolutionists of France and more particularly their English sympathisers like Dr. Price must be demonstrated to be arrested in the mechanical repetition, the moral immaturity, of the half-circle. Because there nothing is accumulated and nothing is remembered, nothing is learnt. Thus Burke is able to suggest that Dr. Price in his sermon "when he talks as if he had made a discovery, only follows a precedent".⁵⁴ His "juvenile warmth" is expended in an unconscious repetition of the "raptures" of another English revolutionary divine, the Reverend Hugh Peters, who ended badly in the previous century with the turn of the revolutionary cycle toward completion at the Restoration.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Reflections*, p. 318.

⁵⁵ According to Burke (*Reflections*, pp. 317-8), Dr. Richard Price in his November 1789 sermon to the Revolution Society had responded to the violent abduction of the royal family from Versailles in the previous October - "leading a king in triumph" - by quoting the "*nunc dimittis*": "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation". However, Price replied in his preface to the fourth edition (1790) of the address in question, the *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London 1789), and Mary Wollstonecraft insists in her reply to Burke (also 1790), that this is a misrepresentation (see M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. J. Todd and M. Butler, 7 vols (London 1989) vol v, p. 25 and n.). Price was referring at this point (*Discourse*, pp. 49-50) to the king's

Thus, for Burke, as a component of the historical inscription which embodies the spirit of the constitution and by means of which the society reproduces itself, there is a functional impurity of the speculative line, an ultimately saving insufficiency or incoherence of the rule. This dialectical accompaniment of culture is democracy, or a demo-graphy which is also a pornography. In the words of Susan Griffin:

the old Biblical notion of whoredom speaks through the mouth of the pornographer. Just as Jeremiah tells us "thou hast a whore's forehead, thou refusest to be ashamed," so Juvenal tells us that Claudius' wife is a "shameless harlot".

For shame is the essential element in the pornographic transformation of a virgin into a whore. The whore is "shameless" because she has already been shamed. She is shame.⁵⁶

This "writing of prostitutes" for and by men mediates the relation between male rivals, or between hierarchised and temporally differentiated versions of the masculine self. The idealising sublimation in relation to beauty, and to the aesthetic generally, is thus complemented by and constituted through the purgation of disruptive and irreconcilable elements.

We are alarmed into reflection; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity; our weak unthinking pride [read: the unproductive swellings, the false erection or pregnancy of a spurious sublime] is humbled, under the dispensations of a mysterious wisdom.⁵⁷

"voluntary" submission to the National Assembly in July 1789, not to the abduction from Versailles in October of that year. This apparent misattribution bears a great deal of weight in the *Reflections*, since it concerns the occasion which more than any other is the means employed by Burke to establish his moral and political superiority to Price and to those reformers and revolutionaries - Burke does not distinguish between the two - supposed to be like him.

⁵⁶ S. Griffin, *Pornography and Silence* (New York 1981) p. 22.

⁵⁷ *Reflections*, p. 337-8.

In this theatre of revolution the law, which is at the same time that of the *Logos* and of the phallus, is born and maintained between two feminine types: the beauty, the chaste love-object who can be in turn mother, wife and daughter; and the whore who reveals too much, who fails to economise, who is abstracted from and threatens the orderly cycle of reproduction. The birth or rebirth of the law in its native sublimity coincides with the replacement of the whore with the chaste woman, or rather with the moment at which the whore, having acted her part in the scenario of her stigmatisation, then adorns herself or is adorned with chastity and modesty. There is here no law as such - juridical and legislative discourses are born from the hierarchical coupling of terror with love, of sublimity and beauty, but only via the supplementary deviation afforded by a confrontation with the illegitimacy that this coupling would conceal. Burke is keen to produce his spectre-woman in all her irresistible compulsion, since for the moral and pornographic imagination of his constituents her princip^{al} effect will be merely to stiffen their counterrevolutionary resolve.⁵⁸ But this is so only with the proviso that the distinction between these two feminine fictions count as moral truth rather than as mere pretence:

Some tears might be drawn from me, if such a spectacle [i.e. the leading of a king in triumph] were exhibited on the stage. I should be truly ashamed of finding in myself that superficial, theatric sense of painted distress, whilst I could exult over it in real life. With such a perverted mind, I could never venture to show my face at a tragedy.⁵⁹

Shame like guilt is a retrospective emotion: to be truly ashamed one must have been at some point, if only from the vantage of retrospection,

⁵⁸ Burke's critic James Mackintosh claimed that "Absolved from the laws of vulgar method, he can advance a group of magnificent horrors to make a breach in our hearts through which the most undisciplined rabble of arguments may enter in triumph" (J. Mackintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae* (London 1791) p. vii, quoted in Fennessey, p. 198).

⁵⁹ *Reflections*, p. 338.

shameless in some degree. Shame here means finding to have occurred in oneself something painted which had appeared to be real, to have exposed a fiction and so to have also exposed what the painted surface had concealed, especially if it is the shameful fact of the lack of anything to conceal. But the operative distinction is not that between art and "real life", even in the form of a demand that life imitate art.⁶⁰ The question is of what nature (of what gender) are the fictions which constitute the real and the merely represented or imaginary alike. Do they constitute or do they fragment a world and a polity?

Indeed the theatre is a better school of moral sentiments than churches, where the feelings of humanity are thus outraged [as by Dr. Price's sermon]. Poets, who have to deal with an audience not yet graduated in the school of the rights of men, and who must apply themselves to the moral constitution of the heart, would not dare to produce such a triumph as a matter of exultation.⁶¹

The "feminine" sublime is situated as a rhetorical counter in a struggle between two male antagonists, making possible a dialectic, a politics and a pedagogy. It is indispensable to the staging of the constitution of the true by

⁶⁰ The *Enquiry* pp. 47-8 (Part One, Section XV: "Of the effects of TRAGEDY") argues that tragedy attempts to erase or to transcend the barrier between fiction and reality but is never able entirely to do so. However, tragic power does not arise from any consciousness that "its representations [are] no realities", that our real lives are safe from merely represented dangers. Indeed, this power will remain in significant respects inferior to that of the real. It consists instead in the operation of the social passion of sympathy: "For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected" (p. 44). It is rather the case that the possibility of adjudicating between fiction and reality is only marginally relevant, because the effect of tragic power is "antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes, without our concurrence" (p. 46). Sympathy is one possible mode of implication in the problematic of the text, but one that is less disturbing than that experienced by the spectators who are stunned by the appearance of Homer's fugitive. This is due to Burke's theoretical derivation of the concept of the text as aesthetic object which suggests that, while sympathy may "partake of the nature" of either sublimity or beauty, this sexual indifference should imply no mixing of genders. Where sublimity and beauty are concerned we are assumed to know where and who we are, also "antecedent to any reasoning".

⁶¹ *Reflections*, p. 338.

means of the purging of the false. In the sublime encounter of two similar beings it is always possible to claim that the death with which he threatens me is that with which, if the circumstances were reversed, I could threaten him. It involves a process of attribution, and so an adjudication of the reality of the threat, of who has what. In this narrative Price is the loser: the woman whom he is depicted as brandishing at Burke and through whom he would confirm his authority is, unbeknownst to him, a site of self-expenditure, is the half-circle, the abyss within which political, pedagogical, aesthetic and sexual identities are consumed. By contrast Burke's is the woman - the queen, *his* queen - who confirms *relative to the other* that he has what it takes. These two faces of woman correspond to the attributes and destinies of the two men. But the very efficacy of the former face, the horrors in which she is dressed and in particular her attribute of going straight forward to her end, of seeming unstoppable, casts doubt on this correspondence. The analogy may fail to constitute without accordingly being reducible to mere ornament or illustration. Despite Burke's attempt to depict her in her true colours, as the mask of a false sublime which is merely an inflation of beautiful weakness, she is no less capable of appearing to be to sublimity and to the aesthetic in general something of what the sublime purports to be in relation to the beautiful: a revelation or unmasking of truth. In this context she is the full circle, the return to the primordial violence, to the anarchy which, despite all possible purges and all the revisionary narratives, continues to threaten patriarchal and aristocratic culture from within.

R. R. Fennessey has pointed out in his useful study of the Revolution controversy that,

Politically speaking, Paine passes for a rebel, and Burke for a conservative; but on the intellectual level, the roles are reversed: it is Burke who revolts against the

commonly held political ideas of his day, while Paine appears as their sturdily orthodox defender.⁶²

But there are other, stranger reversals at work in the *Reflections* which may be less easy to rationalise in terms of distinctions such as that between theory and practice. The oscillation in Burke's text between the two senses of revolution, and so between two models of hermeneutics, requires an affirmation. Authority and legitimacy, as always, must be imposed in hopeful anticipation of the time of prescription; a rhetoric must persuade of that which cannot be demonstrated,⁶³ must effect an evocation of an invisible world. But argument here devolves in the direction of argument from authority, hence the critical importance of determining the gender of one's own sublime, of persuading us that this is indeed possible, and that the sublime is not, as Longinus seemed momentarily to suggest, inimical to persuasion.⁶⁴

Burke's difficulty is that his every effort to distinguish himself from and thence to vanquish his opponent appears already to have been anticipated, his every new departure acquires the semblance of having been a repetition. His antagonist, who is in large measure his own creation, seems also to be his double, and to be perhaps his nemesis. After all, the author of the *Reflections* and his right thinking constituency no less than the degenerate applauders of revolutions

⁶² Fennessey, p. 253.

⁶³ Hazlitt (*Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters* (London 1822) p. 371) defended Burke against the charge of substituting rhetorical subterfuge for sound argument by observing that he was operating at the limits of language and of the expressible, that "there are no words that fully express his ideas, and he tries to do it as well as he can by different ones".

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the general question of the relation between rhetoric and persuasion see P. de Man, "Rhetoric of Persuasion (Nietzsche)" in his *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London 1979) pp. 119-31. Burke is particularly suspicious of "political Men of Letters" who are "fond of distinguishing themselves" and, like new money, "are rarely averse to innovation" (*Reflections*, p. 121). His main charges against them are those of political fanaticism and of an unremitting spirit of faction - two qualities by which Burke was on occasion not exactly untouched.

seem to require "a grand spectacle" of violence and death "to rouse the imagination".⁶⁵ But further than this it is possible for Mary Wollstonecraft to reply tellingly to Burke's denunciation of the "perverted mind" which weeps for theatrical representations but exults in "real" tragedies with the accusation that

a *gentleman* of such lively imagination must borrow some drapery from fancy before he can love and pity a *man*. Misery, to reach your heart, I perceive must have its cap and bells: your tears are reserved . . . for the declamation of the theatre, or for the downfall of queens⁶ [rather than the "vulgar sorrows" of the many] . . . 'The tears that are shed for fictitious sorrow are admirably adapted,' says Rousseau, 'to make us proud of all the virtues which we do not possess.'⁶⁶

Burke's account of revolution is controlled in part by the conjunction of a certain politics of gender - one which even in a generally misogynist tradition can be regarded as somewhat extreme - with the exigencies of the

⁶⁵ Burke is particularly aroused by the notion of a feminine mob, such as that which attended the king and queen to their captivity in Paris after their abduction from Versailles "amidst the horrid yells, the shrilling screams, the frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (*Reflections*, p. 326). This leading of the king "in triumph" through the streets of Paris was a particularly potent piece of revolutionary street theatre, and it seems that Burke was not alone in finding this type of display disturbing. In October 1793 the Convention outlawed women's clubs on the ground that direct political participation by women would result in public "hysteria" (see Hunt, *Politics*, p. 104). Shortly before this the Convention had replaced the goddess of Liberty on the seal of the republic with Hercules, armed with a large club, as a response to the burgeoning power of popular participation (the minimalisation of political representation) and of the Terror, a decision which followed on the heels of the defeat of the Girondins by the more radical Jacobins. According to Hunt, in the revolutionary "family romance" Liberty figures as the daughter to be protected from paternal violence (if not violation) by her brother, Hercules, or the people militant. Thus Hercules was "'popular', fraternal, parricidal, and anti-feminist" (p. 104).

Also in 1793 David organised a festival representing the history of the revolution in which the figure of Liberty is superseded by that of a colossal Hercules - the infant slayer of serpents - accomplishing one of his labours by crushing the Hydra of Federalism (Girondist (?) revolt, disunity or disintegration) which, like Milton's Sin, was depicted as half woman and half serpent (Hunt, pp. 96-7).

⁶⁶ Vindication, pp. 15-6. The quotation is from Rousseau, *Lettre à Mr. D'Alembert* (1758) pp. 31-2, "*En donnant des pleurs à ces fictions, nous avons satisfait à tout les droits de l'humanité, sans avoir plus rien à mettre du notre*". This is a denunciation of theatrical staging and *mise en scène* as such.

hermeneutic model. Revolution is manifested first of all as the turn of a figure, the troping which also turns from politics to the aesthetic and *vice versa*. Where aesthesis mediates the relation of the law to itself revolution is neither lawful nor aesthetic. It is not a harmoniously constituted and constituting scription but a pre-scription which sets in place, sweeps away or transforms literary and political institutions. It is the violence, arbitrariness, madness or ecstasy of the turning which drives politics to the aesthetic and back again.

In the Burkean narrative revolution is the hag, the spectre, who alarms us into reflection, into self-possession, but she is the puppet of a puppet, very much a counterrevolutionary fiction, all too factitious fodder for the aestheticisation of the self and of the state. For Burke is also a revolutionary, and not only in the sense which would oppose his "progressive" method and "reactionary" content to Paine's "conservative" manner of philosophising on behalf of "radical" aims. Having adopted the hermeneutic model he is led astray by its logic or illogic; he is unable to demonstrate the undemonstrable, he cannot deliver the goods, prove that his is the true, the "masculine" sublime, when he has come so much to resemble the other, when his every move to enforce the distinction recapitulates the resemblance. He is left with only a rhetoric, with evocation. Mary Wollstonecraft scores a hit when, taking up Burke's distinction between the aesthetic and the merely theatrical, she reverses his assignment of his own position. The important point for our purposes is not the truth or falsity of Wollstonecraft's charge of hypocrisy, but the possibility of the charge which she so deftly exploits, of the further turn of his own trope to which he will always be vulnerable.

One consequence of Burke's promotion of the hermeneutic model is the conclusion that there can be no scription without prescription, no attribution of truth or lawfulness, no judgement without its admixture of fiction. In every attribution, identification, or interpretation - this last being one name for the supplementary deviation which the integrity of the rule requires - something

equivocates between the "subject" and the "object" of the "act". It is both desired and feared. Burke assimilates it violently to the distinction between the false and the true when it is neither, since it is the condition of possibility of judgements, of the identification which constitutes the speaker as legislator or as judge, which must be "wholly outside the law" and can never be justified. This violence, this falsification, is precisely that which Burke attributes to his nemesis, the revolutionary.

A further consequence of the adoption of this model is the elaboration of a certain thematisation of history - as "tradition" or "inheritance", and above all as narrative - in the service of a self-consciously "hermeneutic" or "symbolic" politics. But Burke's critique of rationalist revolutionism, his constitutive turn to the aesthetic or to fiction, haunts his counterrevolutionary apologetics. His polemic suggests that to the extent that we are drawn or compelled to a like recourse, as by his arguments which touch on the concepts of regulation and legality, or to the extent that a certain interpretative labour requires to be thematised, we are likewise committed to some further, perhaps more searching conclusions. Thus "literature" and "history", like "revolution" and the "state", are legal fictions which obscure and which fail to obscure a dimension, as much and as little aesthetic as political or historical, in their efforts to perpetuate themselves. "Prescription" then may be said to stand, amongst other things, for the insistence of history, of a history which envelops, propels, and distorts or fractures literary and historical perspectives alike without ever quite becoming one of them or one with them; whose relations with the fraternal disciplines of literature and of history are non-simple, and irreducible.

There is a double-bind involved in what the *Reflections* sets out to achieve, to reflect on the necessity of forgetting, to propound a straightforwardly anti-theoretical theory: Godwin concluded that in drawing attention to the utility of prejudice Burke was himself lifting the veil, and destroying his own

system.⁶⁷ One contemporary comment suggested that "Burke wrote with so much passion, so much vehemence, that instead of convincing he created doubts in the minds of his readers, who hesitated to believe a man so carried away by his feelings".⁶⁸ Coleridge's adoption of a dialectical model not only for imagination narrowly conceived in terms of literature, but for a general cultural programme and a politics, whatever his opinion of Burke and to whatever degree Burke may be regarded as an influence, is likely to ensure that he would encounter comparable difficulties.

⁶⁷ F. P. Locke, *Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London 1985) p. 169. Hazlitt, who could not be accused of sympathy with Burke's politics in the *Reflections*, defended him against the charge of substituting rhetorical subterfuge for sound argument by observing that he was operating at the limits of language and of the expressible, that "there are no words that fully express his ideas, and he tries to do it as well as he can by different ones" (W. Hazlitt, *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters* (1819) in A. R. Waller and A. Glover eds *Collected Works*, xii vols (London and New York 1902-6) vol iii, p. 334). This piece was written in 1807 when, according to the author's note (p. 325) "I thought I could do justice, or more than justice, to an enemy, without betraying a cause". See pp. 250-3 (1817) in the same volume for another view of Burke,

⁶⁸ J. Farington, *The Farington Diary* (London 1922-28) vol I, p. 271, quoted by Fennessey, p. 199.

III

A Sign in the Element

**"SHARP CONFLICT OF CONJURATION": MIND AND
METAPHOR IN THE "ANCIENT MARINER" PARTS I - III**

All action has its own manner or method which proceeds from its own essence; every activity of life has its own principles, without whose guidance it will lose itself in indeterminate directions. These principles become all the more urgent when we move from our own spiritual [geistig] and physical world into a foreign one, where no familiar spirit [Genius] is guiding our uncertain steps, or is giving direction to our undefined effort. If we are to construct these principles ourselves, we shall apprehend the alien phenomena, understand the world of the unfamiliar spirit, and surmise their deeper meaning only gradually and with difficulty.

Friedrich Ast

If a bird were to paint would it not be by letting fall its feathers, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves? . . . If I referred to birds who might let fall their feathers, it is because we do not have these feathers.

Jacques Lacan

Painting is the intermediate somewhat between a thought and a thing.

S. T. C.

In his account of the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads* in *Biographia* XIV Coleridge describes Wordsworth's task as that of "awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom" by removing "the film of familiarity" from the everyday. By contrast his was to effect a transfer of inwardness to external "shadows of the imagination", effecting a revelation of what custom conceals about the nature of the self.¹ The twin poetical projects coalesce, they pass into each other at the moment when the customary barriers between subject and object are abrogated. But the thematics of expression which this transfer of inwardness engages are developed in the aftermath of the partial collapse of

¹ *BL* ii, pp. 6-7.

Coleridge's utopian and revolutionary aspirations connected with France and with America, and here they join a problematic of the origin of evil, not as an historical or strictly a narratable event but as an ineradicable condition of finite, historical experience which would account for that collapse. This is one line of thought which leads to the famous claim in 1801 to have "completely extricated the notions of Time, and Space . . . [and to] have overthrown the doctrine of Association, and . . . the doctrine of Necessity".² Coleridge's "evil" now gravitates toward the position occupied by Burke's prescription, and for that reason will issue in a bifurcation of the aesthetic irreducible to the terms of the imagination/fancy distinction as it is propounded in the "result" of the missing deduction.

In March 1798, at about the time that the "Rime" was completed, Coleridge wrote that "History has taught me, that RULERS are much the same in all ages & under all forms of government: they are as bad as they dare to be. The Vanity of Ruin and the curse of Blindness have clung to them, like an hereditary Leprosy". He is "of no party" - "I have snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of Sedition";

I have for some time past withdrawn myself almost totally from the consideration of *immediate* causes, which are infinitely complex & uncertain, to muse on fundamental & general causes - The 'causae causarum.' - I devote myself to such works as . . . in poetry to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate, impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life - in prose, to the seeking with patience & a slow, very slow mind 'Quid sumus, et

² Letter to Thomas Poole, 16 March 1801, *CL* ii, p. 706. The passage continues:
This I have *done*; but I trust, that I am about to do more - namely, that I shall be able to evolve all the five senses, that is to deduce them from *one sense*, & to state their growth, & the causes of their difference - & in this evolvment to solve the process of Life & Consciousness.

For an examination of this claimed overthrow see Christensen, *Blessed Machine*, pp. 58-95.

quidnam victuri gignimur['] - What our faculties are & what they are capable of becoming.³

This is not a definitive turning to philosophy from politics, but the adumbration of a strategy which, in the wake of Burke and reinforced by dawning influences from the Continent, would comprehend the complexity and uncertainty of social experience *and* a transcendental dimension of constitution or production. The fictional autobiography of the "Rime" can be read as an ambitious attempt to combine both of these poetical and prosaic fields of endeavour and in that way as an anticipation of the literary autobiography of 1817. Just as the *Biographia* saw the convergence of autobiography with the transcendental deduction in the concept of imagination which is the "result" outlined in the central Chapter XIII, the "Rime" exhibits the symbolic merging of literal (empirical) and figural (transcendental) narratives in the symbolic, hierarchical simultaneity of the moral. But whereas the first volume of the *Biographia* sets out a theoretical demonstration which is notionally ruined by biographical or historical contingency (the letter, the unfitness of the readership, the inappropriateness of the occasion etc.), the "Rime" offers an account of a practical, autobiographical self-realisation which is ruined by a contradictory transcendental exigency - not a scenario necessarily calculated to appeal to the author of *The Prelude*. This I take to be the burden of Wordsworth's notorious criticisms of the poem in the note printed in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*: "that the principal person has no distinct character . . . : that he does not act, but is continually acted upon . . . : that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other; . . . that the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated".⁴

³ Letter to George Coleridge, c. 10 March 1798, *CL* i, p. 236.

⁴ R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones eds. *Lyrical Ballads* (London and New York 1965) pp. 276-7. Frances Ferguson, in her *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven and London 1977) p. 52, notes that these criticisms comprise "an objection to the predominance of the theological over the phenomenological".

Coleridge had employed ballad metre shortly before composing the "Rime" in two unfinished pieces, "The Ballad of the Dark Ladié" and the more substantial in terms of length, "The Three Graves", a project which began much as did "The Wanderings of Cain" and ~~of~~ the "Rime", since it appears to have been a kind of gift from Wordsworth, who was unwilling or unable to continue it.⁵ The graves in question were those of "a ruthless mother", "A barren wife", and "a maid forlorn". According to a note later appended to the piece by the poet,⁶ the narrative concerns one Edward, a young farmer who becomes enamoured of one of two friends who "though not akin in blood,/They sisters were in heart".⁷ This woman, Mary, comes from a family consisting of a mother and another sister, the father having died in the children's infancy. The mother is "a woman of low education and violent temper", according to the note, but upon application to her Edward is accepted as a suitor for Mary, "And all the 'course of wooing' passed/Beneath the mother's eye".⁸ It transpires that this is an appetitive eye; the mother - she is not named and is perhaps unnameable - becomes fixated upon Edward and, after attempting to undermine his affection for her daughter, waylays him and declares her feelings. Coleridge's note explains that

The Lover's eyes were now opened: and thus taken by surprise, whether from the effect of the horror which he felt, acting as it were hysterically on his nervous system, or that at the first moment he lost the sense of the guilt of the proposal in the feeling of its strangeness and absurdity, he flung her from him and burst into a fit of laughter.

⁵ It does, however, have some notable affinities with Wordsworth's "The Thorn" (1798). Wordsworth withdrew from joint composition of the "Rime" after suggesting elements of the plot and providing a couple of images.

⁶ *PW* i, pp. 286-7.

⁷ "The Three Graves" (1797), ll. 44-5.

⁸ "The Three Graves", ll. 52-3.

The usurpation of this maternal desire which interposes itself between the lovers is catastrophic not alone because it is morally reprehensible, but because for reasons which are yet obscure its radical incapacity to be assimilated to our ordinary notions of good and evil brings about their momentary collapse. At this point Coleridge links the strangeness and absurdity of the Burkean sublime prior to its metaphorical recuperation to male hysteria in the face of transgressive feminine desire. Both are distinguished by an inscrutable semiosis, and an associated experience of loss of self.

As a consequence of this scene the mother's destructiveness is unleashed. She promptly curses Edward and her daughter, and subsequently also curses the friend, Ellen, to whose home the pair had fled. Of the rest of the fragment, the most striking passages might be termed recognition scenes. The first of these concerns Ellen:

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

She felt them coming, but no power
 Had she the words to smother;
 And with a kind of shriek she cried,
 'Oh Christ! you're like your mother!'
 (II. 440-47)

The second, which concludes the piece as it now exists, occurs when Edward had been dozing in the company of the young women "Deep in a woody dell":

So they sat chatting, while bad thoughts
 Were troubling Edward's rest;
 But soon they heard his hard quick pants,
 And the thumping in his breast.

'A mother too!' these self-same words
 Did Edward mutter plain;
 His face was drawn back on itself,
 With horror and huge pain

Both groaned at once, for both knew well
 What thoughts were in his mind;
 When he waked up, and stared like one
 That hath been just struck blind.

(II. 518-29)

The mother who opened the eyes of this modern Oedipus to what was really going on has also metaphorically closed them, just as in her capacity as giver of life she seeks in addition to take it away. She is a vampire who, through *her* eye, "fed" upon the sight of the lovers, and she is responsible for the existence of the three graves which comprise a morbid and sterile "three ages of woman". Her excessive, reprobate desire confronts the male protagonist with feminine implication in a libidinal, temporal cycle of mothers, wives and maids and with an equally horrifying interchangeability of women, a mobility or instability of their identities. Once both are cursed Edward finds that "Ellen's name and Mary's name/Fast-linked they both together came,/Whene'er he said his prayers", and that "in the moment of his prayers/He loved them both alike".⁹ It is on his return home immediately after this, while "they clung round him with their arms,/Both Ellen and his wife",¹⁰ that Ellen first recognises "some frightful thing" in her friend or "sister".

When Mary is cursed by her mother she has just been decking her bridal bed. The mother having revealed her desire to her, Mary flings herself on the bed and there overhears the fatal interview with Edward. It is then that she is cursed.

And Mary on the bridal-bed
Her mother's curse had heard;
And while the cruel mother spake
The bed beneath her stirred.

(II. 146-9)

Mary is cursed by her mother in her sexuality: her inheritance in this feminine line, in this fatherless family, is the curse and its consequences, including the haemorrhaging of identities and of reason into erotically charged superstition and horror. "The Three Graves" describes a catastrophic perversion

⁹ "The Three Graves", II. 370-4.

¹⁰ "The Three Graves", II. 379-80.

of the pantisocratic family.¹¹ The disruptive intrusion of the mother who refuses to be effaced, who puts herself on a level with her daughter who in turn therefore could be "A mother too!", drags the utopian, fraternal bond mediated by a generation of all but interchangeable sisters back toward the process of its own genesis which is at once temporal, corporeal and feminine. She effects an unwelcome anamnesia, crossing the line of the generations (i.e. the line of generation), which Coleridge had hoped to stretch to the width of the Atlantic ocean. Further, if she curses and no doubt is cursed in her sexuality then so is Edward, since it is his desire which is engaged by this multiplication of women, otherwise there would be no guilt, no "hysteria" or descent to the "mothers" in him, and no amorous linking together of Ellen and Mary. In both "recognition scenes", which unexpectedly issue in a loss of self or of agency, the involuntary revelation is virtually orgasmic - for Ellen it is homo-erotic, but seems not for that any less or more horrifying.

What figures in the poem as the horror of a feminine productivity which is appetitive and promiscuous across the boundaries of generation and of gender mirrors a similar promiscuity in Edward. He is, after all the only male figure ("HIMSELF ALONE!") in the poem's main narrative, a fraternity of one, who in the absence of fraternal bonds, of sites of identification, teeters on the brink of a disturbingly enticing feminine perversity. In 1803 Coleridge returns to these concerns:

I will at least make the attempt to explain to myself the Origin of moral Evil from the *streamy* Nature of Association, which Thinking = Reason Curbs and rudders . . . but what is the height & ideal of mere association? - Delerium. - But how far is this state produced by Pain &

¹¹ Coleridge provides two justifications in his note for the use of this scandalous material. Firstly, the tale is made of "positive facts": it has been found, not invented. Secondly, it is not in any case presented as poetry or as a specimen of the Author's judgement concerning poetic diction, on account of the "homeliness" of that diction. It is more properly a psychological or anthropological case study of "the possible effect on the imagination, from an idea violently and suddenly impressed on it".

Denaturalisation? And what are these? - In short, as far as I can see any thing in this Total Mist, Vice is imperfect yet existing Volition, giving diseased currents of association, because it yields on all sides & yet is - So think of Madness: - O if I live! ¹²

The collapse of the dream of a homogeneous pantisocratic community would leave the outcast male beset on all sides by associative chaos, by a disease which is bred in him and from whom it proceeds, the more so in that his is now the solitary burden of engendering significance out of delerium. However, the narrative of this struggle is not a monody; it is represented as the discourse of an old sexton to a "Traveller", his shadowy interlocutor. These two serve to frame the narrative and the ambivalence toward the mother which it memorialises:

Beneath the foulest mother's curse
 No child could ever thrive:
 A mother is a mother still,
 The holiest thing alive.

(II. 256-9)

This contradictory and unmanageable condition of homosocial exchange and of the reproduction of knowledge is thus incorporated if only perfunctorily into a saving work of instruction conducted between generations of men, it is made an object of such an exchange - the mother is a daughter or sister too! But clearly this is an unpersuasive resolution of the problematic which we have been tracing.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" can be considered as an advance upon the position adopted by "The Three Graves". It is a meditation on the possibility of mapping the genetic, feminine, revolutionary but for Coleridge far from utopian space which is opened by the haemorrhaging of the ideal simultaneity of the pantisocratic fraternity, by its inability to transcend the consequences of and its indebtedness to a possibly unresolvable historical,

¹² CN i, N 1770.

corporeal, sexual and political predicament.¹³ This might be described as, in a number of senses, its *topicality*, its resistance to being universalised and idealised. It concerns the actualisation of freedom and the obstacles which are thence encountered and generated. Whereas *Biographia XIII* broached the question of a theoretical deduction in relation to a potential for cognitive disturbance exemplified in the tale of the German servant-girl from Chapter VI, the "Rime" engages in quite closely parallel fashion with issues pertaining to practical realisation, to action or ethics, and it does so by interrogating the structural and ontological bases of moral disturbance, of evil. In the light of these correspondences much of the "argument" of *Biographia XIII* appears already fully elaborated in 1798, in the guise of a response to some of the most pressing public issues of the day.

From the moment the ship "drops" "Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the light house top",¹⁴ which is to say from the moment that conventional, terrestrial points of reference disappear from view, it is apparent that the perspective will be mobile and relative, even reversible. "We", the mariners, only drop below the terrestrial world from its perspective - for "us" it is "they", the landlubbers, who drop below the horizon. Despite the cheers and optimism with which the ship detaches itself from solid ground, it continues to drop until it reaches and becomes stuck at a kind of geographical and cognitive nadir suggestive of marginal or liminal states of consciousness:

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:

¹³ For a comparison of the concepts of "constitution" in Coleridge and Burke and its relation to the constituted categories of the political, see J. Christensen, "Like a Guilty Thing Surprised".

¹⁴ "Ancient Mariner", ll. 23-4.

Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken -
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!¹⁵

It is striking that persons are identified throughout the poem solely by their function, for example "mariner" and "helmsman", but notably not "captain". In Wordsworth's *The Borderers* (1795-6) the sublime villain, Rivers (Oswald in the 1842 edition), falls from a state of naive social acceptance into outlawry when, having gone to sea in his youth he had been "betrayed" through pride while the ship was becalmed and the water exhausted into causing the captain's death.¹⁶ This "revolution" - in context the political implication is unmistakable - has the appearance of a directly narratable event or act. By contrast the voyage of the Mariner seems to be conceived in terms of a state altogether more archaic, perhaps like that of the Hebrew commonwealth before there were kings in the land. Certainly this anonymity suggests aspheterisation, and it seems that one of the contexts addressed by the poem is also that of the projected voyage to the future pantisocratic homeland. In either case it is a journey to a discursive limit. The interchangeability of persons who are to this point definable only by function or location would be facilitated by what must be assumed to be the exclusively masculine character of the ship's society, its more purely ideal, homosocial constitution than that anticipated for the Susquehanna project. But if this is the case, then aspheterisation has also acquired characteristics which are reminiscent of Burke's state of indifference.

¹⁵ "Ancient Mariner", ll. 55-62.

¹⁶ W. Wordsworth, *The Borderers* IV. ii. ll. 1689-1759. The captain, who is unnamed, was abandoned on a tiny island whose "stony surface glittered like a shield", surrounded by "a swarm of minute creatures/Not one of which could help him while alive,/Or mourn him dead" (ll. 1723, 1725-7).

This almost gravitational subsidence or apostasis of the Mariner's craft from common terrestrial experience toward a geographical limit is a generalised and much more than usually enigmatic instance of the *topos* which we have been pursuing, the discovery of decomposition in the social body or of a primordial chaos when reading the text of authority, which was necessarily a site of potentially acute political contestation. We have already seen something of what Burke made of it, but there were of course examples exhibiting a contrasting tendency. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has produced in Europe* (1794), has occasion to meditate on the so far unsuccessful extrication of French society from the prisonhouse of political absolutism and of social and moral artifice. More specifically she passes from an account of "orgies" of counterrevolutionary fervour at Versailles in July 1789 involving the queen, the Comte d'Artois, their favourites and "bribed ruffians" ("with savage ferocity they danced to music attuned to the sound of slaughter") to a consideration of the degeneration of the revolution into merely a renovated despotism. She does so by means of an apostrophe:

How silent is now Versailles! - The solitary foot, that mounts the sumptuous stair-case, rests on each landing-place, whilst the eye traverses the void, almost expecting to see the strong images of fancy burst into life. - The train of the Louises, like the posterity of the Banquoës, pass in solemn sadness, pointing at the nothingness of grandeur, fading away on the cold canvass, which covers the nakedness of the spacious walls - whilst the gloominess of the atmosphere gives a deeper shade to the gigantic figures, that seem to be sinking into the embraces of death.

Warily entering the endless apartments, half shut up, the fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in long glasses, that vainly gleam in every direction, slacken the nerves, without appalling the heart; though lascivious pictures, in which grace varnishes voluptuousness, no longer seductive, strike continually home to the bosom the melancholy moral, that anticipates the frozen lesson of experience. The air is very chill, seeming to clog the breath; and the wasting dampness of destruction appears to be stealing into the vast pile, on every side.

The oppressed heart seeks for relief in the garden; but even there the same images glide along the wide neglected walks - all is fearfully still; and, if a little rill creeping through the gathering moss down the cascade, over which it used to rush, bring to mind the description of the grand water works, it is only to excite a languid smile at the futile attempt to equal nature.¹⁷

The melancholy, pensive wanderer is neither seduced nor appalled, but has a perspective on both possible responses. In this scenario of the degeneration or wasting of privilege reflections and images hover between seeming about to burst into life and fading away, between apparent strength or weakness, between life and death. In lascivious pictures in which "grace varnishes [or beautifies by covering without covering] voluptuousness" the nudity there represented covers the nakedness of space while seeming at once to merge into and to emerge from it, as the underlying vacancy of "cold canvass" echoes that of the walls it partially conceals. An endless vista is evoked of reflections, of glimmer and gloom, not unlike the "gothic cathedral" passage of the *Biographia*. What vainly gleams or fluctuates in the reflection is reflection itself, and the vanity of purposelessness shades into that of the human wishes of which it is the memorial.

Versailles, deserted since the abduction of the royal family on 6th October 1789 of which Burke made so much, is an allegory whose monotony anticipates experience because no experience which is assimilable to its terms can be other than a repetition or reflection of its "melancholy moral". The fall of the *ancien regime* and likewise the corruption of that which took its place comprise merely a belated literalisation of something which was always there to be read in silence by an eye intoxicated neither with "orgies" of counterrevolutionary vehemence nor "the despotism of licentious freedom". The literalisation of this constitutive perversity is revolution or counterrevolution

¹⁷ M. Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has produced in Europe* (1794) in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. J. Todd and M. Butler, 7 vols (London 1989) vol vi, pp. 84-5.

as interminable internecine strife, as a violation of the maternal body: "Unhappy country! - when will thy children cease to tear thy bosom?"

Silence clogs the breath, steals into speech, but not without enabling a compensatory burst of eloquence. Silent reading which is also allegorisation permits a turn from artifice to nature that is not to be simply another repetition or reflection. It anaesthetises, distances and temporalises; the self is reduced, dismembered, locating itself in the motion of a solitary foot or eye, but only to be recollected or remembered prospectively, in an identification with a natural simplicity which is outside and to come. Reading functions to delimit, to evacuate, to reduce, but merely by exposing an always latent vacancy. It structures, and so defines an alternative, a turn outward to a benevolent "nature, smiling around"; it moralises, infusing vacancy with significance. Reading the text of monarchical authority in this way functions as anticipatory empowerment, even if felt, as Coleridge was to acknowledge of certain ostensibly rather different identifications proposed in the *Biographia*, as the present want of power. Wollstonecraft's reading is tantamount to the abduction or decapitation of the king, to the reduction of forms of artificial (counterrevolutionary and antifeminist) prescription.

The descent of the ship would resemble the bottoming out of what Burke describes as the attempt to analyse compound abstract words such as those which convey moral concepts and so contribute prominently to the topography of social experience, but which would apply equally to any of the other forms of laborious compounding by means of which the artifice of a culture is maintained:

For put yourself upon analysing one of these words, and you must reduce it from one set of general words to another, and then into the simple abstracts and aggregates, in a much longer series than may be at first imagined, before any real idea emerges to light, before you come to discover any thing like the first principles of such compositions; and when you have made such a

discovery of the original ideas, the effect of the composition is utterly lost.¹⁸

In the poem the effect of composition does seem lost amidst a general shapelessness, a chaotic in between state or a crossing of the human and the natural ("nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken") which is yet neither, and which is accordingly not accessible for knowledge. Similarly, light does not appear to emanate from a single source but is reflected and refracted dismally, although in Burke's version there^{re} is no salvific turn to a simple exteriority:

These metaphysic rights entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted from their straight line. Indeed in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns, the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections, that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction. The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs.¹⁹

For Burke at least there is in this sense no natural bottom, no simple ground from which to reconstruct a polity or a sentence according to straight lines - even the aesthetic pathways from the body to representations and back again are measured in distances which are also degrees of aversion and of idealisation.

Thus far we have discussed the decent^s of the ship to the vicinity of the south pole as if it were a metaphor for the continuous retracing and undoing of an hypothetical movement of genesis, but to do so has required the omission of some verses which set Coleridge's poetic speculation somewhat apart from these examples from Wollstonecraft and Burke. This is how the stanzas in question begin:

The sun came up upon the left,

¹⁸ *Enquiry*, p. 164.

¹⁹ *Reflections*, p. 312.

Out of the sea came he!
 And he shone bright, and on the right
 Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
 Till over the mast at noon -'
 The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast
 For he heard the loud bassoon.

(II. 25-32)

The different layers of the text's distinctive composition which construct a fiction of historical accretion, perhaps like the levels of reality with which the main narrative appears to deal, do not resemble the harmoniously concentric spheres of the Aristotelian cosmos: they cross and interfere with each other, although they do not *seem* to do so randomly, or not only randomly. Each time the ship crosses the Line on the voyages out and back there is an interruption (in the central episode of the becalming the Line is not actually crossed, the ship turns back instead). As in "The Three Graves" there is a narrative frame which would assign the tale a pedagogical purpose, and so would begin to assimilate it to certain modes of reception and to already constituted differences of authority, even if in this case the authority of the pedagogue is characterised in the first instance as a usurpation, an infringement of the autonomy of his interlocutor. Now, ostensibly through inadvertence or contingency, that frame breaches the integrity of the body it would delimit. But in this crossing of narrative and narratorial temporalities there is also a substitution of a particular kind, since the narration of the ship's crossing the Line is forestalled by a relation of the Wedding-Guest's anguish at his inability to cross the limit to his progress which is set by that same narration. Here, where there is all the appearance of conflict between the one who is forced to speak and the one who is forced to listen, they in effect collaborate in order that something should *not* be said or heard.

The Line is in the first instance, of course, the Equator, a point of equilibrium, of division and of transformation which is imposed on the real by an act of selection, but which also has "real" effects. Thus the pleasant voyage and

optimistic freedom from care of the northern hemisphere (ll. 25-8) becomes instantly and it appears arbitrarily modulated into the tyranny of the storm (ll. 41-50). As will be treated in detail in Part II of the poem, where the path of the sun across the sky crosses the Line there is an absence of shadow, there is the verticality of subordination without remainder, in effect a consummation of metaphor. But however real or at least empirical some of these effects may be, the Line remains also a purely ideal, invisible entity, it is a function of a process of mapping, and so of relations and of movements. This makes it also a function of narrative, something by means of which narrative orients itself, but from which it would seem that it also averts. The subordination which is effected at the Line is that of experience to mapping, to becoming intelligible by means of a notional perspective *ab extra*, effectively that of the sun, and ultimately that of the divine Father. Yet because the Line is the zero degree of latitude, it is also a type of cartographic indifference which makes intelligible differences and so navigation possible. It is the place where the abstract grid which structures space and time and so defines the here and now is supposedly born from the multifarious interrelations and opacities of sensation. No-one should be surprised that it is at the Line that the question of a ground or limit for all our navigating becomes most acute because it is here, if anywhere, that it must be sought and here that it will be most subject to contestation.

The collision and collusion of narrative and narratorial temporalities in the above passage, and elsewhere in the poem, begs interpretation then in terms of another collision, that of a certain millennialism which we would associate in particular with the radical Coleridge of the period leading up to and a little beyond 1795, with something akin to Burke's sacramental historicism, which we would associate with the later theory of imagination that was to acquire so much of its colouring from Kant and from more nearly contemporary developments in German idealism. We would then be required to ask whether such a loaded encounter between narration and narrative, or between the self and

discourse (according to Longinus the *topos* of the sublime) is essentially apocalyptic and epiphanic, or rather hermeneutic and dialectical in character. But we might also be required to ask whether the form of this question is not yet another instance of collusion and whether the character of the encounter in question might not be something other, perhaps involving elements of both of these positions.

On the nether side of the Line, then, there is chaos, a kind of semiological promiscuity or delirium, and there is violence and deprivation which is the reflex of the sociable order and intelligibility of the world above. This is what the Line separates that world from. But it fortunately need not be unrelieved, there is still the possibility of emissaries from the higher regions.

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

(ll. 63-70)

The Albatross is also a cross or a crossing, a metaphor involving, like all metaphors, an "as if". The issue is one of naming, and so not less one of the name by virtue of which all the others name something. This presumptive hailing, this identification and incorporation and this sacrament, is a conceit in which it is possible to read the the naked insufficiency of the social body, its need for sustenance, for completion, from without. But this is a sustenance which can only be found in the very crossing of the human and non-human worlds which is here so much a part of its deadly predicament. Restitution from this point must take the form of evolving order out of disorder, it must be a regeneration - and indeed the vessel begins to make progress. The Albatross fits the bill not least because for food or play - i.e. for a possibly undecidable coupling of a natural

causation and one which is in excess of that nature - it is a part of the world which can be seen to be authentically summoned by a word ("hollo!"). It appears to fill the hollow, the vacancy in the real which the word calls forth. The albatross repays its welcome, fulfills its contract, because "every day" it crosses that line for the mariners, which is to say instead of them. It is their representative and through it they keep the problematic of the line at a distance.

This is also, as we have seen, the function of the Wedding-Guest for the Mariner, and there is not long to wait for another instance: the next time the narrator is interrupted just a few lines later it is to prompt his confession of having shot the Albatross, but this occurs in such a way that the confession is preceded by an even more marked break in the narrative and causal sequence. The interruption forestalls any possible narrative precedence of an intention, and more generally of an "I", with respect to the act of shooting, which is therefore not determinable as an act (an act being always an act of someone).

As Wordsworth complained, things tend to happen in the "Rime" without satisfactorily assignable causes. Coleridge himself relates one celebrated occasion of another complaint:

Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired *The Ancient Mariner* very much, but that there were two faults in it - it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability I owned that that might admit some question: but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgement the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights* tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, *because* one of the date shells, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son.²⁰

²⁰ *TT* ii, May 31, 1830, p. 100. See also the claim of two days earlier (May 29, 1830) that the Book of Job is "an Arab poem, antecedent to the Mosaic dispensation" (quoted above).

Mrs. Barbauld's criticisms are susceptible to caricature, and, whatever the veracity of Coleridge's anecdote, she is almost inevitably cast in the role of the foil whose obtuse, conventional and conservative preconceptions are confounded by the radical character of the work of genius. Yet it must be said that she touches on a difficult point for the poet, one which produces a thoughtful and telling response. Mrs. Barbauld wishes to establish moral connections, she requires the poem to contain an ethical judgement and necessarily also the grounds of such a judgement. The effect of her remarks would be to include the moral law as such in a revised narrative of origins whose consecutive nature, the proportionality of consequences to antecedents which at present admits some question, would be regulated according to probability. She accordingly recalls another feminine interlocutor, the "lady" described in "On the Principles of Genial Criticism", who wished to connect sublimity with beauty, thus confusing them.

Coleridge, on the other hand, wants to preserve the distinction between sublimity and beauty, to hold the line against feminine encroachment and thence to maintain the purity of the imagination. According to *The Statesman's Manual*, the imagination is the "reconciling and mediatory power which, incorporating the [intuitive] 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*."²¹ This birth occurs when the imagination impregnates the (until then Kantian) understanding, which is a discursive, comparative and classificatory capacity and "an instrumental faculty belonging to reason" whose aesthetic corollary is fancy. The understanding thence "becomes intuitive, and a living power".²² Thus would be constituted a prophetic "Sacred History" in which "the Past and the Future are virtually contained in the

²¹ *Statesman's Manual*, Appendix C, p. 29.

²² *Statesman's Manual*, Appendix C, p. 69.

Present", made up of symbols which "must be at once Portraits and Ideals". But this requires an "insulation of the understanding . . . [for use] as the means not the end of knowledge"²³ lest this history "partake in the general contagion of mechanic philosophy" and so result in a still birth,²⁴ a sophisticated version of which confusion Coleridge would later discover in Schelling. To confuse system and ground or the means and the ends of production and reproduction is to confuse genders as well, and this is a terrain on which the poet and philosopher is eager to fight. So (as he narrates the story) Coleridge hits Mrs. Barbauld with a little conversational thunderbolt, part of the import of which is this: the poem of pure imagination should have concerned only the rights of paternity and the already constituted difference between having and not having as it is attributed in transactions amongst men. The implicit point of the remark would be, therefore, "and what have you to do with this?" (Coleridge does not come out of this very well, not least because of his shameless pleasure in repeating the story.)

In the *Arabian Nights'* tale to which Coleridge refers²⁵ it is initially results rather than processes or intentions that count and for which we are accountable. This appears to be in direct contradiction to what we would regard as typically Coleridgean ethical maxims, such as that "If Man be a free Agent, his Good and Evil must not be judged of according to the nature of his outward Actions, or the mere legality of his Conduct, but by the final Motive and Intention of the Mind".²⁶ Both merchant and genie willingly or unwillingly appear to accept the "mere legality" of an "I" for an eye - it is this which exerts a compulsion independently of processes of derivation or justification. A contract

²³ *Statesman's Manual*, Appendix C, pp. 68-9.

²⁴ *Statesman's Manual*, Appendix C, pp. 28-9.

²⁵ E. W. Lane trans. *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 3 vols, (London 1841)

²⁶ *The Friend* ii, p.279 (281).

is swiftly established between the two which would allow the merchant the period of one year - one solar cycle - to wind up his affairs before returning to be killed, and the merchant keeps his promise.

This tale of "The Merchant and the Genie" is also, however, a kind of epitome, an *Arabian Nights* in miniature. The arbitrariness of a lustful king is now that of an imperative or law (like the "eternal laws" at the beginning of "France: An Ode" which are indifferent to human desires), the law of the old dispensation or even of "old violence". The disproportionate reversion of the consequences of the act, as in the "Rime", obeys the law which prescribes a disproportion in the form of an absolute difference between the finite and the absolute. We have encountered this already in Burke's schematisation of the aesthetic, where a tendency inherent in beauty toward degenerative indifferenciation produces a strategy of aversion in which the fiction of death, the absolute monarch, is substituted for indifference. Disposing of the feminine degenerative principle enables a compensatory self-deception effected by means of the sublime, a false attribution or dialectic between male rivals involving the overcoming or distancing of death. In the first volume of the *Biographia* Coleridge applied essentially the same schema to the relation between philosophy and imagination. The ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ or "Know thyself!", an absolute imperative whose object is the beautiful correlation between truth and being, must be arbitrarily interrupted to be saved from itself by the interdiction of the genealogies (there will always be more than one) or increments of that knowing. The ensuing fiction is that of an absolute difference between the relative and the absolute, but the disproportion between representation (or result) and being which follows can issue only in ignorance. At this point there intervenes the requirement for realisation, the repetition of the "Know thyself!", but supported now by a compensatory fictional aesthetics of expression - the "result" of Chapter XIII with its hierarchy of primary and secondary imaginations - with which to override or obscure theoretical scruples.

Here, in the practical sphere of ethics and of politics toward which the "Rime" is oriented we find that Coleridge suggests an earlier adoption of that same model. The merchant falls victim to what is in effect a law of semiotic equivalence which perversely returns an effect or significance to its source irrespective of questions of intentionality. But such effects are returned with interest: there are no degrees of judgement since the relevant fiction, as for Burke, is that of an absolute difference between life and death. The randomness of the merchant's act is answered by the necessity of the death sentence, the consequence of a direct encounter with the law, which is to say with a personification or fiction such as the genie. But it transpires that this law can be circumvented by means of astonishment, by a sublime or fantastic narration. Three sheikhs take pity on the merchant and bargain with the genie for his life in return for three astonishing tales. Each of these stories concerns the transformation of humans into animals and sometimes back again, miraculous recognitions capable of undoing those transformations, and magical reversals and restitutions, all performed by sorceresses (in two out of three cases in opposition to another evil sorceress) whom the sheikhs have then married but who are not present to tell *their* stories. The narration is substituted for blood, for a propitiatory sacrifice, but it works because that narration gives less in order to give more than is required by law. The relation which abrogates but also more than fulfils the contract is virtually symbolic (in the Coleridgean sense) rather than semiotic since it offers a represented process of the restitution of masculine life by feminine sorcery - it depicts the unpredictable ramification of the consequences of an activity (such as casting aside a date shell) beyond any horizon of intentionality or proleptic understanding, as restorative. If this abrogation and fulfilment is merely fictional, it yet produces an economisation of blood or life, and a corresponding surplus, a pleasurable astonishment, which involve "real" effects.

Coleridge's strategy in relation to Mrs. Barbauld is a version of this procedure. He wilfully abrogates the contract between author and reader which prescribes a communication, an equivalence of input and outcome, and as a consequence his "strong" statement to that effect, if not quite astonishing, is certainly calculated to surprise and disconcert. But the outcome is not symmetrical with respect to sexual difference, which is also, for Coleridge, associated with the difference between a result and its derivation. If aesthetic pleasure is obtained by means of a disruption or overturning of the semantic order provided that it takes the form of an economisation effected in connection with a certain feminine or genetic participation, it remains the case that this pleasure is permitted to circulate only among men, precisely within an economy, as an object of exchange. In this paradigmatic encounter, this Coleridgean allegory, the poet has no wish to please Mrs. Barbauld, which would amount to breaching the limits of the pleasure economy, to an expenditure without prospect of return, a confusion of means (probability, understanding, femininity) with ends (the conservation of moral truth and of masculinity).

Sheherezade's objective in the *Arabian Nights* is, at least superficially, an amplification of this "conservative" motif. She must not only ~~to~~ anticipate but also constitute the time of restitution, sublimate lust into love, and so distance the fatality entailed by her meeting with the king. Her strategy is to ensure that the temporality of her narration and of the pleasure which it gives are out of phase with that of corporeal intercourse and the voracious, ultimately barren and self-destructive diurnal solar cycle with which that intercourse is aligned. She is committed simultaneously to distancing but also to soliciting the phallus such that at each attempted consummation there will be an excess or deficit of meaning, something evermore about to be said. Her business is the interruption of one form of intercourse by another, each co-operating to impede and to conserve the other, in which her life consists in a limitation and prolongation of masculine pleasure. In fact, the detachment of the time of

narration from that of the masculine body and of the sun is constitutive of the life, of the continuance of both - in short, of a history which only thus could seek to include and accommodate both. It gives continuity to an otherwise destructive, meaningless and terrible repetition. Eventually the king's desire is mellowed into love, into mutuality, and in wedding Sheherazade he weds instead of destroying his people and himself, constituting a polity - a semantic, social and moral order.

Elsewhere Coleridge provides a more complete explication of the logic of such creative couplings, one which includes both a "Sheherazade" and a "Mrs. Barbauld". In 1825 he would write a passage in a letter to James Gilman which merits quotation in full for its interest as another, this time more consistently humorous essay in literary autobiography, and as a compendium of favourite tropes and motifs which comprise a kind of signature.

It is a flat'ning Thought, that the more we have seen, the less we have to say. In Youth and early Manhood the Mind and Nature are, as it were, two rival Artists, both potent Magicians, and engaged, like the King's Daughter and the rebel Genie, in the Arabian Nights' Enternts., in sharp conflict of conjuration - each having for it's object to turn the other into Canvas to paint on, Clay to mould, or Cabinet to contain. For a while, the Mind seems to have the better in the contest, and makes of Nature what it likes; takes her Lichens and Weather-stains for Types & Printer's Ink and prints Maps and Fac Similes of Arabic and Sanskrit Mss. on her rocks; composes Country-Dances on her moon-shiny Ripples, Fandangoes on her Waves and Walzes on her Eddy-pools; transforms her Summer Gales into Harps and Harpers, Lovers' sighs and sighing lovers, and her Winter Blasts into Pindaric Odes, Christabels and Ancient Mariners set to music by Beethoven, and in the insolence of triumph conjures her Clouds into Whales and Walrusses with Palanquins on their Backs, and chases the dodging Stars in a Sky-hunt! - But alas! alas! that Nature is a wary wily long-breathed old Witch, tough-lived as a Turtle and divisible as a Polyp, repullulative in a thousand Snips and Cuttings, integra et in toto! She is sure to get the better of LADY MIND in the long run, and to take her revenge too - transforms our To Day into a Canvas dead-coloured to receive the dull featureless Portrait of Yesterday; not alone turns the mimic Mind, the ci-devant Sculpturess with all her Kaleidoscopic freaks and symmetries! into clay, but leaves it such a clay, to cast dumps or bullets in; and lastly (to end with that which suggested the

beginning-) she mocks the mind with its own metaphors, metamorphosing the Memory into a *lignum vitae* Escrutoire to keep unpaid Bills & Dun's Letters in, with Outlines that had never been filled up, MSS that never went farther than the Title-pages, and Proof-Sheets & Foul Copies of Watchmen, Friends, Aids to Reflection & other *Stationary Wares* that have kissed the Publisher's Shelf with gluey lips with all the tender intimacy of inosculation! - Finis! ²⁷

Coleridge then explains that this effusion is prompted by the mechanisation and consequent ease and comfort of modern transportation, the journey to Ramsgate "by Land, River, and Sea" having provided no incident of any note for him to recount. He laments that the trip is already too economical to admit of an economisation - it is a transport but not a potential *εκστασις*, it is "flat'ning" rather than elevating.

Accordingly in this allegorical set-piece the making of meaning in the intercourse of mind with nature is inseparable from its erosion. There is no place for a king and no peremptory determination, rather there is a lengthy contest between "LADY MIND" and her counterpart the "Witch" or "Nature" who outlasts her, and whom she at last becomes since the mind's metaphors, and particularly the mind's metaphors for itself, mock it by their reversibility. The result is a tale of ruinous levelling or impoverishment, but also an excess of figural exuberance, a hypertrophy of the relation corresponding to the want of anything to relate. Of course here certain limits are imposed by the autobiographical form and by the construction of the text as a gift to a friend, a gift of the self which is all the more easily and efficiently transported for the want of the impediment which any other object, any actual reference, would constitute. Such a frictionless masculine mobility is predicated upon the corresponding subsidence into inertia of "*Stationary Wares*" which are married to the stationer's shelf. This version of the gothic cathedral passage in the "letter from a friend" of *Biographia* XIII finds Coleridge the reader of his own life in the

²⁷ Letter to James Gillman, 9 October 1825, *CL* v, pp. 496-7.

text of memory and by a compensatory feat of conjuration overturning the burden of the narrative, causing the self to appear in the guise of a purified or liberated *style* - liberated, that is, from the requirement of functioning as anything other than ironic self-presentation. The beautiful youthful symmetries which might tempt the mind to marry such a grateful image of itself inevitably decay into unmeaning or indifference (Mrs. Anna Letitia Barbauld, *née* Aiken, was twenty-nine years older than Coleridge), but the falling away of appearance and analogy, of the phenomenal, only serves to manifest the noumenal in a negative presentation. The difficulty is in understanding why this particular metaphor of the self should be any more durable than the others, and should not end in his being transformed into a "man of letters".

In his response to Mrs. Barbauld Coleridge recoils from the challenge which she represents in her person and in her profession as a woman of letters, from the danger of actually encountering or recognising a woman to the pleasure economy and so to the polity, no less than from that which is implied by her criticisms. According to the tale of the merchant and the genie significance accrues to an action or to a self in unpredictable fashion even or especially if the action is random or meaningless at the time at which it occurs. This posthumous character of the meaningful or the constituted can thence function as a defense against Mrs. Barbauld's implied challenge - there can be no retracing of derivations, no subversive genealogies. This position is consonant with Coleridge's notable disavowals of responsibility for the publication of certain texts (such as "The Three Graves" and "Kubla Khan") which we are cautioned should not be regarded as representative of his own taste or opinions. Therefore it is also congruent after all with the programmatic elevation of intention over performance, provided that the self, the locus of intentionality, is regarded as being thus withheld in a type of utopian immanence and innocence, from textual implication. The poem would erase the marks of its provenance by entering promiscuously into relations with its readers, but this would imply a

withdrawal and intensification, a sublimation of authorial immanence. Consequently a reduction of the text, a bracketing of direct reference or of theme which foregrounds the textual process - rendered as a willing suspension of disbelief or better a hovering between determinant concepts - can serve to manifest that immanence. The text approaches a paradoxical transparency to all but the traces of that withdrawal, to the style or signature, as in the letter of 1825. It becomes symbolic.

The Wedding-Guest interrupts the Mariner at the moment when the narration would have been required to cross the line between intention and realisation. He addresses him with the question - "Why look'st thou so?" - which the inhabitants of the rich man's house might have addressed to Homer's fugitive, the victim of *ate*. The reply in effect discountenances a rhetoric of intentionality in favour of a simple semiotic economy, a bare grammatical relation which by convention lends a neat symmetrical equivalence to the language of activity or of agency: "I shot the Albatross". The naming of the self ("I") corresponds to the death of the object - that is of both objects, including the one which also counts as a subject. It is a substitution, a metaphor, but in the narration it does not involve substituting one entity, such as a self, for another. Rather it is a matter of one type of relation replacing another. The radical, utopian paradigm of participation and of simultaneity, sacramentalised in a manner reminiscent of Coleridge's earlier Christian communism, suffers a dismemberance, a falling away eventually of both the Albatross and of the rest of the crew.

Christian orthodoxy concerning original sin is married to what Marilyn Butler describes as Rousseau's historical and sociological fall into private property from the *Second Discourse*.²⁸ The shooting has a double

²⁸ M. Butler, "Revolving in Deep Time: The French Revolution as Narrative" in K. Hanley and R. Selden eds, *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric* (Hemel Hempstead and New York 1990) p. 18.

signification as both notional historical event comparable to the degeneration of the Hebrew commonwealth into monarchy, and as an ineffable act of the self, choosing evil, which would be at a stroke constitutive of self, society and history as they presently exist. Coleridge's allegory in the "Rime" requires this dual registration of narrative, a "literal" or empirical sequence which is shadowed and informed by a "figural" or transcendental complement. The poem goes on to thematise in terms of aesthetic experience the ordering of the correspondences between the physical, visible world and the unseen, spiritual counterparts which might be inferred from it. But first it illustrates the necessity of such a reconciliation. The sole self which the Mariner has become is entirely under the sway of the subject/object relation, which Coleridge will later explain issues not in "substantial knowledge", but in

that [intuition of things] which presents itself when transferring reality to the negations of reality, to the ever-varying framework of the uniform life, we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to life. This is abstract knowledge, or the science of the mere understanding.²⁹

Transference or metaphor is thus the crux in the familiar impasse of eighteenth century semiotics, and it produces in the Mariner the predictable structural unity of precipitate violence with paralysis already associated with the politics of radicals such as Robespierre and Godwin, who lack the basis of "substantial knowledge". It evinces a skeletal, sterile economy, that of the equivalence in which "we receive but what we give", an eye for an eye, with no enabling absolute difference, no king, and so the generation of no supererogatory power. Again predictably, this is characterised in terms of painting: "As idle as a

²⁹ *On Method*, Essay XI, *CW* 4, *The Friend* i, pp. 520-1. The terminology is Kantian, as in the following note, but the polemic is appropriate to a general critique of enlightenment semiology.

painted ship/Upon a painted ocean" (ll. 117-8).³⁰ The mechanical metaphor of the sign hollows out the self and the world. The Albatross is now brought home (ll. 141-2), the theoretical moment of accomplished signification being achieved at the expense of the evacuation of metaphysical depth. This last is a metaphor which the poem suggests might be referred to the room required for or produced by the nourishing play between nourishment and play, by a type of "primitive", collective or at least non-individual, unreflective or primary symbolisation. The objective of the radical activism of the early 1790's has been resituated, transported in the direction of an immanence constitutively inaccessible to realisation.

The erection of the "I" is also the projection of the vessel to its furthest remove from home, to a place of trial and conversion, on the Line. This half-circle corresponds to what in Schelling (1800), as in Coleridge's account of imagination, figures as the turn to self-consciousness, and at the same time to society or community, to theory, to politics and to history. This turn is possible in part because the grammatical and logical machine can be troped as dialectic, a move which Coleridge outlined in 1827 as follows:

- (i) "Prothesis, the noun-verb or verb-substantive, *I am*, which is the previous form, and implies identity of being and act";
- (ii) Thesis, the noun and
- (iii) Antithesis, the verb;

³⁰ In Appendix C of *The Statesman's Manual*, in R.J. White ed. *Lay Sermons* (London and Princeton 1972) p. 69, Coleridge remarks that,

Of the *discursive* understanding . . . the Characteristic is Clearness without Depth. It contemplates the unity of things in their *limits* only, and is consequently a knowledge of superficies without substance. So much so indeed, that it entangles itself in contradictions in the very effort of comprehending the very *idea* of substance. The completing power which unites clearness with depth, the plenitude of the sense with the comprehensibility of the understanding, is the IMAGINATION, impregnated with which the understanding itself becomes intuitive, and a living power.

(iv) "Mesothesis, the infinitive mood, or the indifference of verb and noun, it being either the one or the other, or both at the same time, in different relations"; and

(v) "Synthesis, the participle, or the community of verb and noun, being an acting at once."³¹

But the reversal turns upon an abiding discontinuity in the process of derivation in terms of the structural precedence of the social, of history, language and gender, none of which can be made subject to the authenticating derivation. In the "Ancient Mariner",

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

(ll. 103-10)

This conventional myth of foundations is that of the insemination of silence by the fertilising Word, of the inscription of a blank or virgin page. But the beginning described here is necessarily untimely and unproductive, issuing only in deflation and dejection. The silence of the air like the blankness of the page recurs, is persistent: it must be repeatedly broken because it has never really been broken, there has been no clear demarcation between "before" and "after".³² In the absence of a real "first time" nothing is conceived or

³¹ *TT* ii, 18 March 1827, pp. 58-9. What is referred to above in logical terms as the Mesothesis is later in this note described in terms of cosmogony as the Metastasis. Again, in terms of theology (*TT* ii, 8 July 1827 pp. 65), the Prothesis corresponds to "God, the absolute Will or Identity"; the Thesis to the Father; the Antithesis to the Son; and the Synthesis to the Spirit. The Mesothesis or the indifference of Father and Son naturally drops out. In terms of the "result" of *Biographia* XIII, the chaos of the Mesothesis would be equivalent to the fancy, and in the terms of the "Rime" she is to be encountered at the Line.

³² In *Biographia* Ch. XXIV Coleridge writes of "the perception and acknowledgement of of the proportionality and the appropriateness of the Present to the Past, [which] prove to the afflicted Soul, that it has not been deprived of the sight of God", but also of viewing the succession of cause and effect in terms of

constituted. If silence cannot be filled by speech it is because speech itself is not full, it contains its own inmixture of silence. A speech or *logos* which exists merely in differentiating itself from silence would be a mere differentiation of silence, would be silence clothed or concealed; at once the deprivation of fullness, originality, and autonomy, and its decay, its degeneration into its opposite:

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

(ll. 135-8)

Such a withering will be no utter withering away but a deformity the obverse of which is a priapism frozen apotropaically by the unfathomable precedence, the alterity, comprised in what may be gathered under such terms as history, language, and gender. These conditions of the self are neither strictly empirical nor transcendental; in no way contingent or accidental, they are not genuinely or exclusively ideal, are not preconfigured to the self and its modes of action or cognition. They are comprehended by a problematic in which the self is implicated, but in relation to which it is not possible to properly locate or define that self. This indifference (mesothesis, metastasis, etc.)³³ or discontinuity in the self, is the place and time where something not strictly narratable, something improper or shameful recurs.³⁴ Consequently the Line features as the

relative opposites subtended by a divine "substratum of permanence" required to stabilise the otherwise "shadowy flux of Time" (p. 234).

³³ Coleridge's use of the term "indifference" in 1827 can be traced to Schelling, for whom it is a means of circumventing the antinomy of dualism vs. monism, e.g. *Of Human Freedom* (1809) trans. J. Gutmann (Chicago 1936) p. 87:

Indifference is not a product of antitheses, nor are they implicitly contained in it, but it is a unique being, apart from all antitheses, in which all distinctions break up. It is naught else than just their non-being, and therefore has no predicates except lack of predicates, without its being naught, or a non-entity.

Indifference here is the chaos in which all existence is engendered; it is the basis of all existence.

³⁴ See Christensen, "Like a Guilty Thing Surprised" . . ." p. 777:

site of an impossible or unspeakable mixing, of an impure and non-legitimate moment of structuration or genesis.³⁵ In this connection the approach of the skeleton ship and the promise it represents calls forth in the Mariner a remarkable response: speech and activity are regained by a breaching of corporeal bounds which is an equivalent within the narrative of its own breaching by the meta-narrative at line 31. Speech is fed with blood, it consumes the body, or rather it is able to be secreted in the movement in which the body breaches or interrupts itself, cannibalises or parasitises itself. What would later be envisaged in terms of the assimilation and resecretion of certain fluids, the mingling of activity and passivity which is also "the self-circling energies of the Reason"³⁶ is not now seamless or harmonious. Language cannot

In the *Biographia* the equivalent of Burke's ancient constitution, that which grounds and entails all our reflections, is the mind itself . . . For Coleridge as for Burke all understanding is reflection on a past moment that is the condition of our knowledge but that can never directly be known. The mind is a self-reading text reproducing itself in an aporetic descent.

³⁵ Coleridge will later assimilate Burke to Kant in order to champion "the idea of an ever-originating social contract" involved with the "idea of person, in contra-distinction from thing" which is also that of an end as distinguished from a means. (S. T. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State* J. Colmer ed. (London and Princeton 1976) pp. 14-5.) The English constitution is then "Lex Sacra, Mater Legum . . . a law not to be derived from . . . elder or later promulgators of particular laws, but which might say of itself - When reason and the laws of God first came, then came I with them". The mother of laws is the consort of Reason, neither his antecedent nor his consequence: the dependence of the idea of Reason on a particular political, historical dispensation is neutralised by a coupling *ab origine*, a wedding, in which an ideal simultaneity would circumvent a problematic of genesis.

³⁶ *Statesman's Manual*, p. 29. Something of what is at stake in this image may be estimated by reference to the following from *TTii*, 19 September 1830, p. 118

It has never yet been seen, or clearly announced, that democracy, as such, is no proper element in the constitution of a state. The idea of a state is undoubtedly a government *ek ton ariston* - an aristocracy. Democracy is the healthful life-blood which circulates through the veins and arteries, which supports the system, but which ought never to appear externally, and as the mere blood itself.

now be secreted without the integrity of the body being also violated, without its being opened to an "outside": expression is not conceived as wholly indigenous or aboriginal to the self.

This breaching serves to announce the arrival of the skeleton ship with its intimations of a forbidden but compelling intercourse:

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres?

Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a DEATH? and are there two?
Is DEATH that woman's mate?

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

(ll. 181-94)

The prominently accentuated slippage of the possessive pronoun from ship to woman describes a malevolent, feminised continuity or confusion of animate and inanimate, of consciousness and its vehicle which might be contrasted with the work of "that reconciling and mediatory power . . . [of]

* * *

A state, in idea, is the opposite of a church. A state regards classes, and not individuals; and it estimates classes not by internal merit, but external accidents, as property, birth, &c. But a church does the reverse of this, and disregards all external accidents, and looks at men as individual persons . . . A church is, therefore, in idea, the only pure democracy.

A church is a kind of spiritual, purely immanent communism which extends to aspheterisation: "the aim of a Church [is] utterly to do away even . . . [with?] personal differences, which it acknowledges and of which it makes use - the comparatively wise to equalise wisdom, the comparatively Good to diffuse the Good". (Quoted by J. Colmer in his introduction to *On the Constitution of Church and State*, p. lx, as Notebook 44, ff. 75-6, c. 1830.) Coleridge continues: "In the United States of America I see an evident, tho' unconscious, experiment to become a Church of this World - a Church temporal."

incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense".³⁷ Moreover "her ribs", which function as if "she" were pregnant with but also imprisoning, persecuting or entombing the Sun/Son, like the sails which resemble "restless gossameres", comprise a form of mediation which immodestly veils without concealing, which somehow obstructs and compromises without shielding or mitigating. This in turn bears comparison with the "translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General".³⁸ In short, "she" is suggestive of a false or perverted imagination.

Her place in all this is that of an illicit intercourse between life and death, which is to say above all that of a profound and ambivalent sexualisation. Her sexuality is marked by freedom, specifically that of her "looks": there is nothing at which she will not look, and she gives herself to being seen as freely as to the activity of seeing. Her shamelessness ("The naked hulk alongside came", l. 195³⁹), her looking and simultaneously being seen to look, contrasts mightily with the Mariner's subsequent exposure to the accusatory gazes of his comrades, with his extreme mortification of one who has been caught in the act. This shamefulness is only possible because the act, and particularly the act which underlies all the others, that of naming the self, of attempted auto-synonymy, is of its own nature something of a trap. Its form here is that of a perversely reversible visual field, and to that extent it is the dissolution of voyeuristic, which is intimately allied to cognitive, privilege. Coleridge will argue in 1816 that,

The rational instinct . . . taken abstractly and unbalanced, did *in itself*, ("ye shall be as Gods!" Gen. iii. 5.) and in its consequences, (the lusts of the flesh, the eye, and the

³⁷ *Statesman's Manual*, p. 29.

³⁸ *Statesman's Manual*, p. 30.

³⁹ Since "she" is both tenor and vehicle, a false "medium between *Literal and Metaphorical*" (*Statesman's Manual*, p. 30).

understanding . . .) form the original temptation, through which man fell: and in all ages has continued to originate the same, even from Adam, in whom we all fell, to the atheists who deified the human reason in the person of a harlot during the earlier period of the French revolution.⁴⁰

But Life-in-Death is capable of being at once Burke's revolutionary harlot and established corruption, the Whore of Babylon⁴¹ who was described in "Religious Musings" (1794-6) as

She . . .

On whose black front was written MYSTERY;
 She that reel'd heavily, whose wine was blood;
 She that worked whoredom with the DÆMON POWER,
 And from the dark embrace of all evil things
 Brought forth and nurtured: mitred ATHEISM;
 And patient FOLLY who on bended knee
 Gives back the steel that stabb'd him; and pale FEAR
 Hunted by ghostlier terrors than surround
 Moon-blasted Madness when he yells at midnight!

(ll. 342-51)

As painted woman (ll. 190-2) or harlot,⁴² the "Woman" is the one who paints herself, compromises herself, and whose art is thus to assume and

⁴⁰ *Statesman's Manual*, pp. 60-2. The claim which concludes this passage is a cliché of counterrevolutionary propaganda, without historical veracity.

⁴¹ See N 2598 (1805) *CN* ii: "France is my Babylon, the Mother of Whoredoms in Morality, Philosophy, Taste".

⁴² See M. L. D'Avanzo, "'Her Looks Were Free': The Ancient Mariner and the Harlot" *ELN* 73 (March 1980) 185-9:

Spiritual faithlessness to God is repeatedly expressed as sexual infidelity. In Hosea, for example, marital infidelity represents Israel's apostasy. Israel is lawfully wedded to God; the conditions are the Covenant. Christians are the bride of Christ; the spirit of love is their testament. Apostasy, idolatry, and violations of the first commandment are breaches of the faith and the covenant to which the bride Israel pledges herself in marriage to God. Whoring after strange gods is a commonplace in the figurative language of Israelite apostasy, beginning with Exodus [34:15-6]. In Isaiah [1:18,21] the sinful nation has "become a harlot"; its "sins be as scarlet . . . red like crimson". In Jeremiah [2:20, 3:1] and Ezekiel

flaunt her shame. Her painting is not representation, not the regulated and regulating interplay of an ideally critical stereoscopy, but still less could it be the dream of a symmetrically or complementarily reversible and so complete visual field. Her beauty such as it is has the depth only of an artificial and dispensible skin which in some measure we are to be persuaded conceals but also reveals a latent source of horror. Unsurprisingly this takes the form of a communicable disease,⁴³ and in particular that of the disorganic thematised as uncleanliness or profanation, as the Biblical-Hebraic mark of exclusion which is leprosy.

In *Life-in-Death* is located the perverse capacity of genealogies to delegitimise and to denature the very thing which it would appear they are destined to unite to an order of natural production and reproduction. Her companion - her "fleshless Pheere" in the version of 1798 - is initially not Death but "a DEATH", not the perennially captivating and mysterious focus of ethical and metaphysical concern, the enabling occasion of the Burkean sublime, but its reduction to the merest conventional mark; at once a contribution to the poem's archaising, medievalising strain, its "Gothic" apparatus, and a stock, almost a cartoon figure. This Death would be but one of a potentially infinite series of perfectly interchangeable signs or replicas to any of which she might be

[16:15,41] a backsliding Israel "plays the harlot". In Revelation the idolatry and crimes of Rome are expressed in the figure of the great scarlet whore, or "BABYLON THE GREAT, OR MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" [17:5].

The pre-eminence in this list of the Whore of Babylon serves to link this figure to specifically discursive disorder, to the dismemberment of language and the spoliation of the mother tongue.

⁴³ See N 1250 (1802) *CN* i, which records a dream from the day before that of Wordsworth's marriage: "I was followed up & down by a frightful pale woman who, I thought, wanted to kiss me, and had the property of giving a shameful Disease by breathing in the face". Coleridge, who had more than a passing interest in medical matters, would probably have been aware that one of the most significant symptoms of leprosy is anaesthesia.

joined. In this primacy *vis-a-vis* an implied constellation of skeletal and so exchangeable masculine positions, it is possible to detect her "Night-mare" translation into the problematic register of generation rather than of structure or ideality, much as in "The Three Graves", of the dream of a pure, maternal matrix of homosocial and textual incorporation. It is no wonder that after this display of implicitly incestuous polyandry it is appropriate for the Mariner to invoke that other paradox, the virginal "Heaven's Mother" whose inviolate maternity severs the basis of homosocial incorporation from its potential contamination by the chaotic and uncertain genetic cycle.

The alliance of the Woman with death then refers, via what is now a perverse interchangeability of fathers and sons, to the morbidity, the decay of the paternal, of the patronym, of the name as termination or destination as well as of metaphor and thus of death, the king.⁴⁴ Consequently in this passage from father to son which is at the same time that from son to father there is no resting place offering recovery or true restitution for life. In the dice-game life, to the extent that it appears to figure in the scheme of things at all, is not a player but is rather in play, as prize or object of a certain desire and threat. The casting of the dice must allocate - there can be no question of adjudication - between the prerogatives of Death and Life-in-Death. It concerns what appears retrospectively for the life of the subject as the strictly necessary and irreducible chance that there will have been this consciousness, which at the same time relegates the others of that consciousness to objecthood, to representation and to death. Although the name and significance in general is the *destination* of the act as the self-instantiation of the living being, its already accomplished *destiny* is here represented via the dice-game.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Arac has suggested in his "Repetition and Exclusion: Coleridge and the New Criticism Reconsidered" *Boundary 2* 1979 8 (1) p. 272n. that "one might . . . read *The Ancient Mariner* as the narrative transformation of a theory of metaphor".

COLERIDGE AND ALLEGORY

As she laughed I became aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles . . . I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon could be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end.

From "Hysteria", by T. S. Eliot.

There is a general Ridicule cast on all allegorizers of Poets - read Milton's prose works, & observe whether he was one of those who joined in this Ridicule.

S. T. C.

The most crucial moment of transition (or of failed transition) negotiated by the narrative of the "Rime" is also a fruitful intertextual crux, a moment when the poem more obviously joins, relies on, and polemicalises in relation to a noteworthy point of literary and also, in a sense, of more than literary history. In the following discussion the episode involving Life-in-Death and Death will be treated as Coleridge's rewriting of Milton's allegory of Sin and Death from Book VI of *Paradise Lost*, another poem which addresses in manifold and sometimes contradictory ways the problematics of revolutionary aspiration.

In a lecture on Shakespeare delivered in London in 1811 (as transcribed by J. P. Collier) Coleridge observed that

painting cannot go beyond a certain point; poetry rejects all control, all confinement. Yet we know that sundry painters have attempted pictures of the meeting between Satan and Death at the gates of Hell, and how was Death represented? Not as Milton has described him, but by the most defined thing that can be imagined - a skeleton, the driest and hardest image that it is possible to discover;

which, instead of keeping the mind in a state of activity, reduces it to the merest passivity . . .¹

The "state of activity" referred to here is that of an unfixed wavering, a "middle state of mind" which is a "hovering between images . . . attaching itself permanently to none". This is characteristic of imagination as distinguished from understanding, which fixes on one image: imagination results, a little paradoxically, in "the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image". The "mechanical understanding", by contrast, is at home with the disjunctive mode of abstract universality and specious particularity found in allegory, as described in *Lay Sermons*.

Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot.²

Allegory, in what reads like a hostile *précis* of Burke's account of language in the *Enquiry*, is an entirely fantasmatic semantic economy in which the "phantom proxy" substitutes not for a substance but merely for another phantom, another proxy, without end. Moreover, it is to Milton's description of Death from *Paradise Lost* that Coleridge unmistakably alludes when called upon to characterise allegory in general.

As is now generally recognised, Coleridge's attitude toward allegory is far from simple, and thanks to some recent scholarship there is some useful material available on the history which informs this complexity. In one of the most significant recent studies of the sublime, Steven Knapp demonstrates the manner in which Milton's "Gothic" allegory of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* had by the end of the eighteenth century become something of a critical crux. In

¹ Appendix C, "The Text of Lectures 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12 of the 1811-12 Series as published by J. P. Collier in *Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton* (1856)" in R. A. Foakes ed. *Lectures 1808 -1819 On Literature* vol. ii, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed.K. Coburn vol. 5 (Princeton 1987) p. 496.

² *Lay Sermons*, p. 30.

particular he observes that the personification of Death by then "virtually carried the issue of allegory as part of its thematic content".³ On one side of the debate were commentators such as Addison who had no general objection to a poet's deployment of "such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them . . . Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits" or "any Passion, Appetite, Virtue or Vice under a visible Shape" may without impropriety become "a Person or an Actor in his Poem".⁴ But this latitude was coupled with a demand for a consistent naturalism or literalism in "Epic Allegory". Addison's objection is to allegorical *agency* in epic, but he mitigates the fault by speculating that Milton's choice of narrative afforded him too few human agents, whom he was forced to supplement with "Actors of a Shadowy and Fictitious Nature".

Here Addison is on the verge of broaching a point of some interest which is not developed by Knapp, who is committed to an alternative view of Milton's engagement with allegory and personification. Milton's "Hebrew", monotheistic epic involves a different form of initiation from that conventionally associated with, for example, the *Illiad*. It inflects the traditional beginning *in medias res* away from a perception of its operation in Aristotelian, formal and mimetic terms only, and as a result calls forth a supplementary apparatus of allegorical personifications, such as Sin and Death, which are intimately connected with the crucial ontological transitions negotiated by the poem. Milton will attempt to narrate the emergence of the human - of society, of history and of narrative, of the ambit which is appropriate to classical epic - from within the epic form, just as he attempts, as finite historical subject, to trace the contours of a total history. Thus Coleridge in 1819 distinguished *Paradise Lost* as

³ Knapp, p. 9.

⁴ D. F. Bond ed. *The Spectator*, 5 vols (Oxford 1965) no. 419, vol. iii, p. 570; quoted by Knapp, p. 53.

Christian epic from "all epic Poems whose subjects are from History" such as the *Illiad*, which

have no *rounded* conclusion - they remain after all but a single chapter in the volume of History tho' an ornamented Chapter . . .

. . . It [*Paradise Lost*] and it alone really possesses the Beginning, Middle, and End - the totality of a Poem or circle as distinguished from the ab ovo birth, parentage &c or strait line of History . . . ⁵

The formal and, in terms of the relevant traditional problematic, the mimetic question of the beginning of the narration is crossed by an alternate, more explicitly transcendental problematic of the narration of the beginning which would be required to ground mimesis - Milton possessed "an imagination to which neither the Past nor the Present were interesting except so far as they called forth and embraced the great Ideal, in which and for which he lived, a keen love of Truth".⁶ For Milton the grounding of mimesis means exonerating God and so salvaging as best he can a coherent notion of divinity and a sense of the coherence and purposefulness of history in the face of apparent counter-revolutionary triumph. Because the poem as *work*, as finite production shaped by and everywhere retaining the marks of its unique human provenance (what Coleridge called the "subjective character of the poem"⁷), would account within itself for the relation of a paternal deity to his creation, it is capable of furnishing an anatomy or allegory of the generally aestheticising concept of the work as autotelic - not least in its finding consolation in a proleptic account of ultimate recuperation. Allegory in both of these senses pertains to notions of

⁵ "Lecture on Milton and the Paradise Lost", 4 March 1819, *CW* 5, pp. 388-9.

⁶ "Lecture on Milton and the Paradise Lost", p. 387.

⁷ From "Unassigned Lecture Notes" in *CW* 5, pp. 427-8. This is explained as a characteristic of "all modern poetry in Christendom", in which there is "an underconsciousness of a sinful nature, a fleeting away of external things, the mind or subject greater than the object, the reflective character predominant. In the *Paradise Lost* the sublimest parts are the revelation of Milton's own mind, producing itself and evolving its own greatness".

agency or of efficacy which are not those of empirical, individual consciousness nor of absolute, divine or ideal consciousness, but of an indispensable intermediate sphere by means of which the narrative will attempt to regulate the relations, specifically those of production or genesis, between the two. Coleridge observes that "High poetry . . . [being] the translation of reality into the ideal under the predicament of the succession of time only" presents Milton with "insuperable difficulties" in relation to the autonomy of finite, Satanic consciousness, which must be obscured with the utmost tact, notably by "keeping the peculiar attributes of the divinity less in sight, making them to a certain extent allegorical only".⁸ Allegorical agency, as in the case of Sin and Death, would be capable of appearing in other than a simple historical sense more archaic than and constitutive of that of finite, historical or "fallen" human consciousness.⁹

For Knapp the trend of the objections to Milton's allegory which became prominent in the eighteenth century are summarised as follows:

"Imaginary" agents disrupt the realistic texture of epic partly because they represent an alien mode, but also because they call into question the status of ostensible "real" or "historical" agents. If personifications are animated through the intensification of metaphor (or more precisely, through the intensification of a metaphorical vehicle at the expense of its supposed "tenor"), then mimetic agents may have a converse tendency to slide "back" into metaphor (that is, the agent may turn out to be the vehicle of a previously unsuspected or forgotten tenor). The reversibility of personifications thus makes the boundary between rhetoric and agency less secure than it might have seemed. As figurative language seems more violent and opaque, agents may seem more transparent and abstract.¹⁰

⁸ "Unassigned Lecture Notes", p. 426.

⁹ Knapp associates allegorical personification in the eighteenth century with enlightened ambivalence toward the power of "archaic" literature and beliefs, but by this he means pre-Enlightenment styles of thought and constructions of authority read within a simple historicist framework.

¹⁰ Knapp, p. 60.

Thus Kames, in the chapter on "Epic and Dramatic Composition" in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), objects to "making these figurative beings act beyond their sphere, and creating a strange jumble of truth and fiction".¹¹ Johnson opines that "when the phantom is put in motion, it dissolves"¹², and also comments that *Paradise Lost* suffers from "want of human interest": "The man and woman who act and suffer are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know",¹³ therefore there can be no occasion for identification or sympathy.

Knapp observes that we have no record of Coleridge's solution, promised in 1818, to the problem of how far Milton's allegory of Sin and Death might be an exception to such a censure as that of Johnson's, which is accepted by Coleridge as applying not to *Paradise Lost* as a special case of epic verisimilitude, but to narrative allegory in general as tending to be deficient in the power to excite "lively interest". However, some remarks on "poetic faith" which are suggestive in this respect occur in a lecture of 1811-2 on *The Tempest*. Here Coleridge adverts to the problem of a mixture of Scriptural ("true") and fictional components such that some poems of this type appear "like mingling lies with the most sacred truths". But Milton in *Paradise Lost*, like Shakespeare in relation to history in *King Lear*, has chosen for his subject "that one point of Scripture of which we have the mere fact recorded".¹⁴ Thus the poem is grounded in truth, but is far from compromised by its inevitable divergence from it. This permits an effective critical segregation of truth from fiction, an absence of comparison. In the same lecture Coleridge had explained the nature of dramatic, and by extension aesthetic representation in terms of a familiar "intermediate

¹¹ H. Home (Lord Kames) *Elements of Criticism*, 6th ed. (1785; rpt in facsimile New York 1972) vol ii, pp. 393-5, quoted by Knapp, p. 62.

¹² S. Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 3 vols, (Oxford 1945) vol. iii, p. 181.

¹³ S. Johnson, *Lives* i, p. 233.

¹⁴ J. P. Collier's notes of Lecture 9 of the 1811-2 "Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton", *CW* 5, p. 363.

state", termed "illusion", between "delusion" and a critical, reflective demystification. This experience involves a voluntary "suspension of will and the comparative power" in relation to which the representation has only a "negative reality".

The most consistent alternative eighteenth century critical position to that which characterised Sin and Death as "Gothic' intruders in the essentially realistic and classical world of the epic",¹⁵ adopted amongst others by Burke, finds in it an instance of the sublime. Here Knapp relies on a reading of the sublime in Burke and Kant which stresses a contrast, which is to say a comparison, between an ideal, self-originating agency (Burke's Providence, Kantian Reason) and "the lives of our ordinary selves".¹⁶ Personification or ideal agency is allied to sublimity to the extent that the personality is not only entirely subordinated to the thematic idea of which it is the vehicle, but in addition represents within itself a reflexive consciousness of that idea: it is "self-consciously obsessed with the grounds of its own allegorical being".¹⁷ Although Knapp does not quite say so, we might also infer a tendency for a philosophical or theoretical obsession with the grounds of one's own being therefore to allegorise the self, to combine an appearance of solipsism with a seeming attenuation of substance - the sublime personification being "both devoid of empirical consciousness and perfectly, formally conscious of itself".¹⁸ The obviously fictional character of such personifications combined with "their self-originating power" makes them "nearly perfect embodiments of the sublime ideal" in all its human impossibility.

¹⁵ Knapp, p. 2.

¹⁶ Knapp, p. 3.

¹⁷ Knapp, p. 3.

¹⁸ Knapp, p. 83.

The predominant examples adduced by Knapp are Milton's Death, Spenser's Despair, Collin's Fear and Mallet's Ruin. However, it would not be unfair to say that one particular personification rather than any other presides over Knapp's discussion. He writes that "In a certain peculiarly overdetermined sense, Milton's Death is the ideal personification, since its unimaginable description - as well as its inconceivable tenor - corresponds to the impossible doubleness of personifications in general" - that is, to their "oscillation between the fixed materiality of a literal agent and the figural transparency of a nominal abstraction."¹⁹ Death is not just a good or even the best example of sublime personification: again Knapp does not quite say so but this redoubling of the doubleness of the personification qualifies it, in the terms of his argument, as a personification of personification or allegory of allegory.

This characteristic of solipsistic reflexiveness shared by all sublime personifications is the object of certain criticisms by Coleridge of Spenserian personification, recorded in marginalia to Robert Anderson's *Poets of Great Britain*.²⁰ Two examples are given by Knapp, the more "crucial" of which is the account of Grief (*Faerie Queene* III, xii, 16) in which Coleridge finds a disturbing "confusion of agent and patient" since Grief himself is grieving. But the other instance which here receives much less attention, that of Dissemblance, is also of some interest. Dissemblance is paired with Suspect in the masque of Cupid in Busyrane's castle, just prior to the appearance of Grief:

And after them *Dissemblance*, and *Suspect*
 Marcht in one rancke, yet an vnequall paire:
 For she was gentle, and of milde aspect,
 Courteous to all, and seeming debonaire,
 Goodly adorned, and exceeding faire:
 Yet was that all but painted, and purloynd,

¹⁹ Knapp, p. 36.

²⁰ See G. Whalley ed. *Marginalia* i, *CW* xii (1980) p. 54.

And her bright browes were deckt with borrowed haire:
 Her deedes were forged, and her words false coynd,
 And alwaies in her hand two clewes of silke she twynd.

But he was foule, ill faoured, and grim,
 Vnder his eyebrowes looking still askaunce;
 And euer as *Dissemblance* laught on him,
 He lowrd on her with dangerous eyeglauce;
 Shewing his nature in his countenance;
 His rolling eyes did neuer rest in place,
 But walkt each where, for feare of hid mischaunce,
 Holding a lattice still before his face,
 Through which he still did peepe, as forward he did pace.

(*Faerie Queene* III, xii, 14, 15)

Here Coleridge objects that "that which is and may be known, but cannot *appear* from the given point of view, is confounded with the visible"; as Knapp remarks, "the whole point of dissemblance . . . is that one cannot tell the hair is borrowed".²¹ *Dissemblance* exhibits an "apparent confusion of descriptive with thematic information", of literal with figural senses or of substance with shadow. In a way she is also a personification of the confused structure of personification in general, but she differs from Milton's *Death* in that she exhibits her participation in that confusion, whereas he maintains in his own mode of representation a clear distinction between literal and figural. He effects a lucid representation of confusion. The threat associated with *Dissemblance*, Coleridge tells us, is to the "given point of view" which is that of empirical consciousness, of what Knapp has called "the lives of our ordinary selves". If, like Burke's revolutionary whore, she shows too much, the effect of this is to leave no place for empirical consciousness to locate itself in opposition or contrast to her, and so no opportunity for mastering her - as she does at *Suspect*, she may merely laugh at any such dangerous, would-be sublime looks. Like *Suspect*, the empirical self is then in danger of succumbing to an obsessive

²¹ Knapp, p. 83.

fixation upon the search for an elusive point of fixity, a *concealed* truth which could be engendered by the unmasking of the false, and which would ground that self as contrasting or opposed. But here where nothing is hidden there is nothing to see. The self would be allegorised as the obsessively and laughably self-deceptive allegory of allegory, as would any self the moment that it became suspect in this manner.

The similarity between this coupling in Spenser and Coleridge's rewriting of Milton's allegory are underlined by what resembles a reminiscence of this last image at "Ancient Mariner" ll. 177-80 and ll. 185-6, where Life-in-Death is herself the "lattice" or "grate" through which a masculine figure peers. While the woman is assimilated to a grate or to a grid as of a map, to an artifice for containment and mediation, the masculine figure is split into the Mariner, only potentially an empirical self; into Death, a redundant allegorical sign; and into the Sun, an origin and a potential (audible but not written) product, "son" or "Son", which is barred, since he peers through her ribs. In the passage from Spenser it is Suspect whose paranoia and gynophobia causes him to "bar" himself, who shows his nature in his countenance by concealing it, so that what shows is concealment not less than that other "nature" which is imperfectly concealed. This being so, the inequality of the coupling, with its misogynist containment of dissemblance, might succumb to Suspect's pace being more comprehensively "twynd" with his partner's as but an aspect or reflection of her own compulsive twining and twinning. If Suspect thus names a threat to the empirical self, it is similarly a threat to the formal lucidity of a contrastingly allegorical figure such as Milton's Death. Suspect is in part a Death haunted and disabled by, unable to detach himself from Dissemblance, since in relation to her it is manifestly he who dissembles, who is suspect.

Coleridge's reply in the "Ancient Mariner" would not be less than crucial for his own poetics, since it would be to have inserted *his* Dissemblance between the senses of "Sun"/("son";"Son") just as Fancy is inserted between the

primary and secondary imaginations in the *Biographia* and elsewhere. This *transcendental* mapping which is semiological, ontological and sexual would now seemingly comprehend or inscribe the movement of its own production and reproduction. The play of the Sun, its dissembling of itself which has proved so troublesome to interpreters of the poem,²² would have been contained once more in the intermediate feminine element, answering Coleridge's objection to Spenserian allegory - provided, that is, that the implied or potential son who resonates but is not literalised in the Sun can successfully be born(e) across the bar which separates and defines the dimensions respectively of paternal transcendentalism or transcendence and of its expression, filial empiricity or phenomenality.

Finally, let us for now merely note once more the way in which the Dissemblance/Suspect coupling as a possibly distinct, and perhaps a fuller model of reflexiveness, certainly one which entertains an element of sexual difference, yields in Knapp's discussion to the example of the solitary, masculine figure of Grief as the prototype, for Coleridge, of the sublime personification, just as Milton's Death is permitted to preside over the argument in general.

What disturbs Knapp in the debate over sublimity thus far is not the somewhat Nietzschean argument advanced by Weiskel and radicalised by Hertz that the sublime is an effect contrived by means of a "ruse". He accepts that "the

²² E.g. the notorious disturbance of Robert Penn Warren's allegorisation of the poem by the play of the sun and his reflection, the moon. See Brown, "The Art of Theology and the Theology of Art". It also appears as the relation between the metaphor of light and the light of metaphor which irradiates and helps to organise Coleridge's metaphysics - see J. A. Hodgson, *Coleridge, Shelley, and Transcendental Inquiry: Rhetoric, Argument, Metapsychology* (Lincoln and London 1989) pp. 8-9. In this connection might not the Sun's "broad and burning face" (l. 180) also be that of shame, since here his concealment shows, he is showing too much?

desired effect [of the sublime] depends on taking literally what is really an ingenious substitution".²³ But he does seek to differentiate his own position in relation to three main issues. He specifically questions the claim that the Kantian imagination, according to Weiskel, undergoes a *repression* in something like the psychoanalytic sense, with all its unavoidable political resonances. In addition he moves to heavily qualify the role of identification or self-confirmation as he finds it represented in the writings of Weiskel and Hertz. However, probably his most fundamental objection is to Paul de Man's argument that, in Knapp's words, "Coleridge appealed to a rather sentimental, quasi-theological notion of the symbol in order to conceal the phenomenological and linguistic truth revealed by allegory".²⁴ In each of these instances his aim is reminiscent of Weiskel's (to whose memory his book is dedicated), since it consists of attempting to provide a basis for retaining the distinction between allegorical and literal agency, while evacuating it of the dangerous tensions and confusing indeterminacies under which that distinction threatens to collapse. Both conclude their studies with Wordsworth, situating Coleridge as the question to which Wordsworth is the answer, as a moment of transition, a propaedeutic articulation which serves to unveil the Wordsworthian avatar - a strategy in which they are partly but ambiguously anticipated by Coleridge himself.

De Man's analysis is tackled quite early on in the discussion. The problem of distinguishing allegory from symbol, according to *The Statesman's Manual*, is that of recognising a "medium between the *Literal* and the *Metaphorical*".²⁵ Knapp argues strenuously that "what is at issue in the promotion of the symbol is not the metaphysical status of representation [as de

²³ Knapp, p. 102.

²⁴ Knapp, p. 61.

²⁵ *Lay Sermons*, p. 30.

Man had suggested] but the practical consequences of action and belief".²⁶ In what way can "practical consequences" be insulated from questions about the "metaphysical" status of representation? It transpires that Coleridge sidesteps de Man's type of strict cognitive critique in that the proposed medium "is in fact a distinct alternative" to both nominalist emphasis on figuration and a dogmatic realist literalism. Coleridge refers in this connection to the relation between the celebration of the Eucharist - "The communicant's act of self-identification with Christ" - and "the totality of the believer's practical relations to Christ".

Coleridge has thus shifted the locus of consubstantiality from the equation of bread and body [in the Eucharist] to the synecdochic relation between act and history . . . what makes the symbolic equation 'essential' instead of arbitrary is the impossibility of separating *any* history from the acts that embody it.²⁷

Needless to say this turn to the practical or to history, and thence to an ontology of the act or will is an authentically Coleridgean and in a much looser or more rudimentary sense a Burkean move. It comprises a principal instance of one of those historical marks by means of which a text is assigned to the category "Romantic". The effectiveness of such an observation as a rebuttal of the position adopted in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" is diminished, however, by a failure to engage with de Man's - or for that matter with Derrida's - extensive work on speech act theory, on the relations between cognitive and performative linguistic operations. But rather than develop this point here we will trace the trajectory of Knapp's argument which also does not acquiesce in such a resolution, concluding instead that the Coleridgean symbol is less a genuine medium than "an unstable means of transition from difference to identity".²⁸

²⁶ Knapp, p. 16.

²⁷ Knapp, p. 18.

²⁸ Knapp, p. 22.

One of the most significant capacities of sublime personification noted by Knapp is that of representing a mediation between contrasted orders of being which is effected by an "abstract public consciousness" - by means of conventions or forms of explanation which are not reducible to any simple psychic interiority. Pope's ironic apotheosis of the bathetic or the inverted sublime in the *Dunciad*, his identification of this public consciousness with the triumph of Dulness or with fanaticism, recalls the extent to which the notion of an increasingly important general public consciousness in this period is replete with political and cultural dangers for established authority, and so is in need of strict regulation and limitation. In Knapp's historical narrative Milton and Wordsworth combine to delimit and so to contain "the Coleridgean interest in literature" which ("at the risk of sounding too readily teleological") is identified as an ideal, implicit throughout the eighteenth century, of "a reconciling medium between fiction and literal belief".²⁹ This ideal, which Knapp describes as self-defeating, conceives of literature as a mode of "epistemological leisure", a device for "detaching beliefs from the consequences of believing" which "finds a close analogue in broader philosophical and political attempts to imagine the self as a medium between private illusions and normative truth".³⁰ To this end Wordsworth is read as reconstituting with deliberation a state of affairs which obtained unconsciously in Milton's poetry - namely an *indifference* to the mixing of literal and figurative agency which contrasts with Coleridge's imagined synthesis, with the thematisation of the issue of figuration in terms of the opposition between allegory and symbol. The self-disfiguring "Coleridgean interest" occupies an analogous place in Knapp's schema to that which is reserved for fancy in Coleridge's: it is a means for establishing distinctions and continuities between conscious and unconscious, and so for managing synchronic

²⁹ Knapp, p. 140.

³⁰ Knapp, p. 141.

and diachronic processes of repression and conservation. In particular, we shall find that the notion of an historically discrete "Coleridgean interest" operates to constitute the contrasting lack of interest or "indifference" to be exhibited differently in Milton and in Wordsworth.

Coleridge "wants to dissociate genius [with its capacity to endow figurative creations with literal force] from its historical implication in violence",³¹ where we are in no doubt that this violence is as often as not social or revolutionary in character. The benevolent or at worst harmless genius in literature or art must be distinguished from the sometimes dangerous genius in life and in history, men who "in time of tumult . . . [have the power to] change kings and kingdoms, as the wind shifts and shapes the clouds".³² While the power of genius is not to be considered *essentially* as the power to hurt, active or "commanding" genius, lacking the "self-sufficing power" of absolute genius, is susceptible nevertheless to something closely resembling fanaticism. Hyperactive, irritable, suffering "A debility and dimness of the imaginative power" and so reliant on "the immediate impressions of the senses", the Coleridgean fanatic lacks a real sense of self, seeking a substitute in the volatility and explosiveness of "the crowd", where "The passion being in inverse proportion to the insight, that the more vivid, as this the less distinct; anger is the inevitable consequence".³³ Here he finds his own character writ large as what might be called a bad because empirical or fanciful universality, an immediate theorisation and literalisation. The fanatic resembles the sublime personification in that his lack of a sense of self produces a maniacal absorption in what in cognitive terms is a concentrated effort toward self-comprehension, and in practical terms is a relentless but self-defeating drive toward self-

³¹ Knapp, p. 28.

³² *BL* i p. 33.

³³ *BL* i, pp. 30-1.

realisation. Knapp argues convincingly that the Coleridgean imagination tends toward fanaticism, from which it must be rescued via the interposition of fancy:

without . . . tendencies of differentiation [fancy] . . . the 'conscious will' [secondary imagination/figural] would lose itself in a mad identification of imaginary recreation with involuntary perceptual fact [primary imagination/literality] . . . the imagination must be saved by fancy from its own potential violence.³⁴

The mind "is saved from the fanatical violence of centripetal concentration by the enthusiastic substitutions of the associative fancy".³⁵ As Coleridge argues in the "Apologetic Preface to 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter'" (1815?), allegory or personification fictionalises darker passions and modifies them by a "specific joyousness" linked to the operations of association and fancy, derailing and carrying off fanatical violence on an infinitely extensible circuit of more or less arbitrary associations. Allegorical violence is thus insulated from reality by its own fantastic, fictional character. Yet, as Knapp points out, Coleridge is also given to arguing the reverse, that allegory or personification can *occasion* identification and violence.³⁶ As we have seen in connection with the French revolution, allegory is in important respects *the* didactic and revolutionary mode, the product of the violent, utopian dissolution of an "intermundium" which is resistant to understanding, of a precipitation at once toward significance and toward realisation. The transparency to the idea toward which revolutionary, ideological violence is directed is as much allegorical as it is literal, so that, as Knapp indicates elsewhere, the implicitly political madness which afflicts sublime personifications is related precisely to the inability to tell the difference between the two.

³⁴ Knapp, p. 30.

³⁵ Knapp, p. 34.

³⁶ Knapp, p. 36.

Moreover, the implication which we have just observed of fancy - through allegory - in fanaticism, which is the tendency to which imagination is subject unless rescued by none other than that same fancy, suggests that the Coleridgean imagination is but a differentiation or dissimulation of fancy. This would account for Coleridge's notoriously irresolvable ambivalence toward fancy and allegory, and also for their propensity for assuming forms which resemble diabolical parodies of their more valued opposites. Thus the self-circling energies of (symbolic and phallic) reason and the corresponding fantasy of an absolute moral autonomy - qualified only by Coleridge's theistic orthodoxy - discloses too great an affinity with the fantasmatic economy of allegory, and is perpetually threatened by its always latent, masturbatory and emasculating counterpart : "The magic rod of fanaticism is preserved in the very adyta of human nature; and needs only the re-exciting warmth of a master hand to bud forth afresh and produce the old fruits."³⁷ Fancy knows no reconciling medium, no internal principle of stability or judgement. Like the eighteenth century semiotics which it represents, it is capable of appearing either fanatically literal or enthusiastically figural.

Still, apart from any such consideration, Coleridge's attempt to secure an autonomous sphere or a specific and effective mediation for poetry in relation to the chaotic and sometimes dangerous perturbations of history and politics is extremely vulnerable for Knapp. Poetry "must be insulated from the modes of literality it both imitates and inspires",³⁸ since "an identification of the two realms amounts to idolatry or fanaticism, to a kind of mad literalization and reduction. But the identification is inevitable, if only because even a refusal of one identity merely establishes another".³⁹ Such a delimitation of the literal,

³⁷ *BL* i, p. 197.

³⁸ Knapp, p. 42.

³⁹ Knapp, p. 41.

reductive power of literature or of allegory can only be effected by recourse to a contrasting literality which must be produced by a more or less violent and certainly unwarrantable reduction. This being the case, Coleridge's theory of the state, which attempts to resist - and thence to synthesise - both "liberal nominalism" and a realist, organicist totalitarianism,⁴⁰ like Burke's comparable attempt to provide a basis for the distinct and integral character of both individual and society on a basis which could be neither organicist nor mechanistic, is dependent on a certain concept of history as temporal continuity, which would ease the necessary transitions.

The principal alternative to such a failed Coleridgean/Schellingian synthesis identified by Knapp is Kantian irony, and in this connection he finds that the emphasis on self-confirmation or identification in the Kantian sublime proposed by Weiskel and Hertz is "misplaced". For Kant the empirical self is "only ironically or intermittently identified" with the supersensible self, as in the division of the sublime experience into "an imaginary danger and an actual condition of safety".⁴¹ This latter discrepancy, which as Ferguson points out risks reducing the sublime to a mere "shell game", is recuperated as ironic distance - an irony, that is, directed at the empirical self, which can muster no more than a "negative presentation" of rational identity, rather than at reason. The sublime is not to be understood as reason's inescapable self-ironisation in the course of its attempted self-recognition. The empirical self is only contingently related to the unitary standard of reason⁴² and is defined for itself by its deviance from that standard. This is why the sublime for Kant requires a

⁴⁰ Here Knapp (p. 44) cites *TT* ii, 18 December 1831, p. 153.

⁴¹ Knapp, p. 77.

⁴² Knapp, p. 78.

"preparatory culture" or education, why a capacity for it must be developed, and why Enlightenment is a process, necessarily entailing a history.

There are thus two modes of reflexive consciousness in this sublime encounter: one obsessively and fanatically singleminded, the other an observer, coolly and ironically comparative. But the Kantian sublime does not aim at a psychological repression or self-confirmation in a unifying identification, rather it is directed toward a partial identification which affirms a hierarchical difference, a subordination of figurality to truth which would attempt to balance the contrasting threats of non-serious fictionality or enthusiasm and of over-serious, hence ridiculous fanaticism (Kant's *Schwärmerei*).

But does this balance work? Knapp is of the opinion that it does not:

The fanatic, mindlessly absorbed by delusion, is not himself sublime or aware of sublimity; to appreciate the paradox of fanaticism one must *not* be a fanatic. Fanaticism stands both for the aim and the destruction of the *of* sublime identification; the moment of identity is also a lapse into bathos. The Kantian subject is thus condemned, as a kind of negative fanatic, to oscillate between sympathy and irony or bathos in relation to the self's identification with truth.⁴³

Failure to "insulate" the sublime personification from contact with its empirical counterpart invites the "levelling (Burke might have said "democratising") effect" pinpointed by the neo-classical critics of Milton's allegory, but success in this respect makes the confrontation purely a matter of form, a sham.

Thomas Weiskel had characterised sublimity in general, and the Kantian sublime in particular, as repressive. The imagination is tricked by reason into attempting something which it cannot accomplish:

it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in the sublime, reason posits its own sensible or imaginative frustration in order to discover itself freshly in an attitude of awe . . . Hence the real motive or cause of the sublime is not efficient but teleological; we are ultimately referred not

⁴³ Knapp, p. 82.

to the failure of empirical imagination but to reason's project in requiring this failure. The cause of the sublime is the *aggrandizement of reason at the expense of reality and the imaginative apprehension of reality.*

* * *

Reason cannot, in Kant's system, undergo a development or an essential aggrandizement. But the sublime moment offers to reason an occasion for self-recognition.⁴⁴

In fact reason's development, its progressive self-clarification, occurs in history, and is treated in Kant's extra-critical, extra-systematic writings. The sublimity of reason, the timelessness of its internal architectonic and the universality of its properly philosophical expression are constituted by means of its systematic divorce from the narrative of which it is the result. By contrast Coleridge's somewhat Schellingian notion of a reconciling medium is consonant with the prospect of an overt dialectical or systematic return to historical narrative which in this way becomes suffused by meaning.⁴⁵

Weiskel's repression thesis envisages a limitation to the passive representation of the sensible of an imagination defeated in its efforts to apprehend the supersensible. Knapp counters by stressing ~~of~~ the thematics of liberation - which are also of phallicisation, although this is not noted - with which Kant accompanies this transaction. Particular reference is made to the example of "the exhilaration of Hebrew iconoclasm", to what is described in the Third Critique as "the enthusiasm which the Jewish people, in their moral period [i.e. before the institution of kingship among them], felt for their religion when comparing themselves with others". Similarly, the imagination is

⁴⁴ Weiskel, pp. 40-2.

⁴⁵ Lecture 13 of the 1818 "Lectures on European Literature", which draws on Schelling's "*Über das Verhältniss der bildenden Künste zu der Natur*" (1807), accordingly affirms that "the Artist must first *eloign* himself from Nature in order to return to her with full effect . . . [he must] produce in himself that co-ordination of Freedom & Law . . . which assimilates him to Nature" (CW 5, p. 222). In essence this is what the Mariner finds himself attempting, but without accomplishing the requisite co-ordination and therefore without contriving a definitive return or *nostos*.

rewarded in the sublime by "a feeling of being unbounded", a feeling of release which presupposes a comparison with its former state:

For when nothing any longer meets the eye of sense, and the unmistakable and ineffaceable idea of morality is left in possession of the field, there would be need rather of tempering the ardour of an unbounded imagination to prevent it rising to enthusiasm, than of seeking to lend these ideas the aid of images and childish devices for fear of their being wanting in potency.⁴⁶

Kant is quick to draw the political implication that governmental repression is served by the deployment of such devices to arbitrarily limit the "spiritual powers" of citizens, to "facilitate their being treated as though they were merely passive" or puerile.

Enthusiasm, which is compared to delirium (*Wahnsinn*), is a form of imaginative hypertrophy, an excessive, necessarily doomed effort of apprehension in relation to the rational idea,⁴⁷ a strenuous activity which draws the mind away from obsessive fixation. Whereas fanaticism, the identification of sensible and supersensible, is "an undermining disease" comparable to mania (*Wahnwitz*), a "profoundly ridiculous" condition in which the imagination is "anomalous", enthusiasm is merely "a transitory accident to which the healthiest understanding is liable to become at times the victim".⁴⁸ It is compatible with the sublime in that the mind is motivated more powerfully than by sensible representations, but unlike the case in relation to apathy ("*apatheia, phlegma in significatu bono*", in Kant's opinion the desirable absence of sensuous, "pathological" determination) the freedom of the mind is impeded, is *temporarily* suspended. Kant thus envisages two types of "revolution" in the mind, only one of which is progressive and is effectively normalised as the accompaniment of health, as but too much of a good thing. It is certainly presented as a better

⁴⁶ *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 127-8

⁴⁷ *Critique of Judgement*, p. 107.

⁴⁸ *Critique of Judgement*, p. 128.

bargain than the fanaticism which is its only alternative. To this extent Kant's more moderate argument has affinities with that of historians such as Volney whose *The Ruins of Empire* (1791) sought to normalise revolutions good and bad as the engines of history. The liberation of imagination of which Knapp makes so much is a strictly transitional phenomenon for Kant, enthusiasm occupying a role in some ways comparable to that assigned to fancy by Coleridge. This transience is due to a comparison with the rational idea, the apprehension of which in a negative presentation is the result which cuts off the inflationary progress of enthusiasm. It is this which ensures that the rise of imaginative ardour is *ultimately* liberating, devolving into autonomy, in contrast to the obsession which sinks toward the enslavement of fanaticism.

Enthusiasm is the means by which this enslavement to the positive is replaced by subjection to the negative presentation, the means by which the sensible, the unfree or fixated which will not otherwise pass away, gives birth to the supersensible. Nevertheless it is depicted as a "transitory accident": the trajectory of the Kantian subject is defined as far as possible solely in terms of the positive and the negative presentation. In particular there is no term for a persistent enthusiasm which would not be magnetised by the rational idea, for a sceptical fanaticism. This omission of what here is termed "utter difference" is explained by Knapp in his outline of the "structure of partial identification" in Kant:

The danger of utter difference or sheer fictionality is easily handled; rather than threatening the sublime experience, this condition prevents it from ever beginning. The agent who recognises no sublimity of disposition in himself is simply condemned to humiliating fear or indifference. The opposite danger of total identification, the collapse of all difference between reason and empirical consciousness is figured, for Kant as for Coleridge, in the issue of fanaticism. And here the prescriptive negativity of Kant's sublime comes into play
 . . .⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Knapp, p. 79.

Knapp's assertion that a threat of annihilation from the beginning is no threat at all assumes that which must be established, namely that "the sublime experience" actually takes place, that the empirical experience of some such phenomenon renders nugatory the question of its theoretical possibility. Another way of making this point is to note the assumption that "the agent" is already there before the sublime occasion - that personal agency is more primordial than sublimity. To put the issue in this manner is to produce it as an echo of the Kantian transcendental analytic, with its silent privileging of the empirical.⁵⁰ Thus we are told that for Kant "The agent's integrity, such as it is . . . precedes the sublime experience, which reimposes the divine claim as a further obligation to conform, and also reestablishes the fact of the agent's deviation".⁵¹ This repetition (reimposing, re-establishing) is the very movement of enlightenment, of bringing to consciousness an understanding of the self as rational, as subject to and obligated by a discrete supersensible order.

It transpires that for this reason fanaticism represents "at least partly an artificial danger":

Kant's vision of fanaticism is itself an impossible satiric ideal, a product of the fictional logic of the sublime, as the excessive language of pathology ("an undermining disease") and of oxymoron ("rational raving") suggests . . . This is only to say that the interest in fanaticism, as in archaic modes of thought, is as much literary and ideological as it is psychological. The point of fanaticism is to establish, by means of contrast, the Enlightenment's sense of itself. The fanatic, like the allegorical personification, expresses an Enlightened fantasy of pre-Enlightened agency . . . ⁵²

What this "fictional logic" absurdly attempts to replace is the threat of "sheer fictionality", and the crumbling of the architecture of the sublime

⁵⁰ Knapp recognises (p. 82) that Kant's "commitment to important elements of empiricism remained secure throughout his development of the critical philosophy", and most of them are no less secure in Knapp's own discussion.

⁵¹ Knapp, p. 78.

⁵² Knapp, pp. 82-3.

which is manifested at this point refers us to a *repressed* concept of indifference closer to Burke's than to Knapp's, one which is, as we have seen, much less easily handled. The object of the repression is that which in a transcendental perspective education would strive to lead us from or correct, the notion of an original and so irreducible deviance or contingency which figures in Knapp's polemic as de Man's thesis of "the primacy of figures".

Moreover, Knapp employs a comparable "fictional logic" in *his* sublime contention with Weiskel and Hertz. Identification in their arguments is not the same as Knapp's fanatical "total identification", which he opposes to ironic detachment. It is not an assumption of identity with the object of the identification, but the establishment of *an* identity by means of its differential relation - sameness *and* difference - to the introjected object, to the representation.⁵³ For neither of these, following Freud,⁵⁴ is the identification

⁵³ E.g. Weiskel, p. 45: "the judgement of the sublime [for Kant] comes into play precisely insofar as man cannot attain the totality; the intensity of the sublime experience is a direct function of the impossibility of realising (in any way) the idea of humanity (or any supersensible idea)." Similarly, when Hertz proposes the encounter with the Blind Beggar in Book VII of *The Prelude* as an instance of blockage he instances the fixity of the admittedly minimal difference "between representor and represented" (which is also derivatively that between subject and object) in relation to itself (p. 60). Consequently in the ensuing identification the poet's self is "triangulated" with that of his double. This is anything but what Knapp calls "total identification" (p. 79) since the admonishment from "another world" at which the experience aims is the apex of the triangle - it is an effect of the differential relation between the blindness and fixity of the Beggar and the spiritual turbulence of the poet for whom he is a "spectacle" (1805 VI, l. 616).

⁵⁴ For a connection between identification in this sense and the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation, see S. Freud, "The Ego and the Id" (1923) in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, vol xi of *The Pelican Freud Library* (Harmondsworth 1984) pp. 368-9. In the same article Freud explains that the relation of the ego ideal or super-ego to the ego "is not exhausted by the precept: 'You [the masculine subject] *ought to be* like this (like your father).' It also comprises the prohibition: 'You *may not be* like this (like your father).'" Both of these injunctions of course assume the differential character of identification. Further, Freud states that "This double aspect of the ego ideal derives from the fact that the ego ideal had the task of repressing the Oedipus complex; indeed, it is to that revolutionary event that it owes its existence". The relation to Kantian reason is taken up almost immediately in a reference to the "compulsive character" of the power of the super-ego over the ego "which

in question the same as actual identity, or anything other than partial or conditional. The fanatic's delusory identification "falsely collapses the distance between empirical agency and universal obligation" so that although he "virtually personifies the sublime occasion", he is incapable of the sublime experience.⁵⁵ To reconstitute that distance and so to preserve enlightened objectivity, fanatical reflexiveness must be limited to the extent that the fanatic can become the object only, but never the subject of irony. Thus for Knapp "much of the interest of the *issue* of personification . . . depends on an overt distinction between ~~between~~ allegorical and literal agents",⁵⁶ between fanatics and ironists. He explicitly excludes from his study - speaking only of the traditional male cannon - the composite "ironical fanaticism" (or perhaps "fanatical irony") of Blake, along with the related visionary poetics of Shelley. Thus it is possible to discern in Knapp's characterisation of Coleridge's "pervasive habit of thought", his "oddly abstract desire to establish a medium between identity and difference"⁵⁷ the outline of an excessive, a typically fanatical and obsessive self-conscious preoccupation with the grounds of one's own being. The two prominent components of the sublime encounter, ideal personification and empirical person, are finally personified by Knapp in "Coleridge" and "Wordsworth" as relatively negative and positive critical fantasies of literary agency.

manifests itself in the form of a categorical imperative [*kategorische Imperativ*]" (p. 374).

⁵⁵ Knapp, p. 81.

⁵⁶ Knapp, p. 6: "In the partly figural and partly literal characters of Romantic myth-making [such as in Blake's *Zoas* or Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*], the contrast between these separate kinds of agency disappears." The tendency which is evident in this exclusion seems as much ideological as literary-historical.

⁵⁷ Knapp, pp. 42, 43.

It is Wordsworth who is credited by Knapp with developing an "alternative to the practical antinomies of sublime personification". This would be no small achievement since he opines that "major poetry" might not have been possible in the sublime personifying mode until such a submergence of explicit eighteenth century "poetic ambivalence".⁵⁸ It should be said that Knapp scarcely discusses Coleridge's poetry, and his major poetry not at all. Coleridge figures in the argument as a (or as the) critic and theorist, unlike Wordsworth, whose "practical" alternative fares better than the Coleridgean symbol. This consists of the partial naturalisation of allegory, a deliberate mixing of literal and figurative intentions, which allows sublime figures to occupy the same "discursive space" as the poet.⁵⁹

Such a "naturalisation" of allegorical personification amounts to the evacuation of specifically allegorical significance from the allegory. Its liberation from ostensible univocal or obsessive thematic determination, and from the proper name which announces it, renders the figure in terms which might be described, by analogy with the Kantian purposefulness without purpose, as allegorisation without allegory. The resulting discrepancy between literal ("natural") significance and figural (allegorical) resonance becomes, for Wordsworth, the index of a poetic power in excess of natural determination (something after the manner of the Kantian sublime), and isolates the figure from its "natural" narrative or discursive context - including from the poet who is now part of that context. The personification appears formally self-enclosed, but without succumbing to obsessive fixity for want of the requisite thematic hook. This is, then, a version of a standard (in particular a Kantian) aestheticising move: the representation becomes opaque to theme or reference in order to manifest a transcendental agency which is responsible for informing or

⁵⁸ Knapp, p. 99.

⁵⁹ Knapp, pp. 100, 104.

allegorising and so making a thematics possible, and which survives an exposure of the delusory character of any such thematics. But this episode of (Kantian) enthusiasm is not to end in an identification in the form of Coleridgean synthesis or even of Kantian irony.⁶⁰ The "Coleridgean interest" in literature which would insulate it from violence and from history, both in its properly Coleridgean form of qualified synthesis and as Kantian irony, resolves itself, for Knapp, into an unstable oscillation. Our reading of his argument has suggested the conclusion that, to paraphrase Weiskel, Coleridge's fancy posits its own sensible, historical and political frustration in order to misrecognise itself as imagination. According to Knapp, Wordsworth's resolution would expose the ensuing oscillation or discrepancy in a manner which is calculated specifically to resist subjective appropriation.

Comparing some instances of the occurrence of groups of allegorical personifications (at *Aeneid* vi, ll. 273-81; *Faerie Queen* ii, vii, ll. 21-2; *Paradise Lost* ii, ll. 629-883; *Windsor-Forest* ll. 413-22 and its apparent inversion, *Dunciad* iv, ll. 641-50; and "Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College" ll. 57-9) Knapp draws a striking conclusion:

In each of these examples, a cluster of personifications has been stationed at a crucial threshold between opposing realms or conditions, and each is engaged, actually or potentially, in a violent or threatening confrontation. Each offers to block the progress of a questing or conquering agent . . . Yet . . . except [in] Gray's ode . . . the abstractions turn out to be ineffectual opponents, easily avoided or conquered by the agents they confront. Despite their resemblance to the monsters of archaic ritual and myth, their role is not so much to enforce a boundary as to saturate it with explicit meaning. Except in *Paradise*

⁶⁰ Knapp praises Wordsworth's "reluctance to trace [the imagination] . . . to an empirical origin in the poet's psyche" (p. 109) in contradistinction to Coleridge, but the point is highly unpersuasive. While Knapp will attempt to locate the Wordsworthian "imagination" safely outside the self, as an agency without an agent, Coleridge's account is rather more interesting. Since (according to the "true original realism") our bodies and sensations really belong to us, but reason which is universal and impersonal does not, imagination in mediating between the two is called on at once to define and to breach the boundaries of the self.

Lost, the thresholds are in fact overcrowded with figures, while the figures in each group are so thematically consistent as to seem redundant. An effect of exhaustive signification, of thorough legibility, temporarily suspends the drama of heroic trespass. Such episodes provide a strangely extroverted alternative to the standard model of sublime self-consciousness: instead of a subject receiving a magnified sense of self in return for an experience of failure or terror, a narrative pauses long enough to allow the display of an abstract, public consciousness - a consciousness that need not be imputed to the agent whose journey has been temporarily halted.⁶¹

Sublimation occurs in such cases as a suspension of contradiction (Coleridge would have said disbelief) by means of an allegorical intervention *ab extra*, an interruption resembling that of the letter in *Biographia* XIII. This takes the form of a selective and calculated appeal to a version of a public sphere which interrupts a progress only to facilitate a transition, to supply a significance the lack of which might otherwise prove to be disabling. The allegory is characterised by thematic consistency to the point of redundancy and by a certain transparency to significance - in short, by the type of homogeneity and interchangeability which we have associated with Coleridge's aspheterised pantisocracy. It is a discrete utopian moment peculiarly resistant to the strategies of appropriation practised by the empirical self.

Knapp traces the operation of this schema in "Resolution and Independence" (1802), and his argument is of particular interest here because of the poem's manifest affinities with and telling differences from the "Rime". The Leech-Gatherer resembles the archaic, irrationally fascinating form which confronts the Wedding-Guest: "The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs", "not all alive nor dead" but "As if . . . A more than human weight upon his frame had cast" (ll. 56, 64, 70). He is a wanderer whose peculiar ontology as described by Wordsworth isolates him from the perceiving self and from

⁶¹ Knapp, pp. 126-7.

nature.⁶² But whereas the Mariner imposes himself upon his interlocutor, here it is almost the other way around. The Leech-Gatherer arrives more like the Albatross or the water-snakes, as if "by peculiar grace,/A leading from above, a something given," (ll. 50-1). This is for the benefit of a poet who *wishes* to be diverted not from a wedding but from fearful thoughts of the divorce between poetic achievement and worldly exigencies which have something of an involuntary, obsessive character. The chance encounter with the Leech-Gatherer suggests a possible compensation for the abrupt, arbitrary transition from "the might/Of joy" to dejection which "sometimes chanceth" (ll. 22-3) and which now oppresses him. Comparison of this predicament with the similar transition in the "Rime" Part I (ll. 25-50) from fair weather in the northern to stormy in the southern hemisphere is sufficient to recall some of what is at issue here. The ensuing dialogue with its prominent pattern of inattention, interruption and repetition is characterised not by the enslavement of the poet-auditor but by his strange inability to focus on the content of the old man's speech: "But now his voice to me was like a stream/Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;" (ll. 107-8). The poet who thus hears without hearing is like the friend of *Biographia* XIII who in a manner of speaking reads without reading, without experiencing a conventional communication of knowledge.

Knapp finds that this "pattern of pausing and renewing" so reminiscent of Coleridge's water-insect (or of the terrestrial movements of a leech) becomes divorced from its dramatic or narrative pretext, and thence from the desires and predicaments of the empirical self.⁶³ Thus the social awkwardness between the two men arising from differences in class and wealth

⁶² Knapp, p. 112.

⁶³ Knapp notes that the old man commences his third attempt to explain his livelihood without this time being questioned by the poet (ll. 132-3), but the conclusion is doubtful - having been alerted to the poet's shortcomings as an auditor he might plausibly have been looking out for signs of wool-gathering, and have decided not to wait to be asked.

merely "corresponds" to what Knapp says the Leech-Gatherer "really" stands for.⁶⁴ The pattern in question is that of poetic form, in this case the measured, repetitive, athematic movement of the shortened Spenserian stanza. The decontextualised, self-enclosed, opaque figure of the Leech-Gatherer is, like Milton's Death, a personification or allegory of allegory, which is now specified as the personification of the autonomy of poetic form.⁶⁵ For this reason he evades the expectations of the poet that he will offer a message of consolation or will in some other way answer to his personal or psychological need - he escapes "the phenomenological - indeed, the *Coleridgean* - appropriation".⁶⁶ The poem may include "a version of the self-referential turn that the sublime requires", but it turns upon an agency or efficacy which is not that of the self. Both person and personification are effects of the form which serve to dramatise the discrepancy between the poetic medium and the strategy of self-reflection which is characteristic of the sublime, and the Leech-Gatherer "both produces and represents" this disparity "between psychological theme and poetic medium". The union of production and representation which is the object of Coleridgean theoretical fanaticism is in this way sustained with impunity by Wordsworth's impersonal practicality. Thus the Wordsworthian imagination "is a recurrent pattern of attention and oblivion, of concentration and diffusion, produced by the agency of poetic form", it is "the repeated dislocation of attention from particular images of the self."⁶⁷

In this reading of the sublime the drama of opposition and identity is suspended or defused not by the Coleridgean medium predicated on liberal faith which is treated with consistent irony by Knapp, but by liberal scepticism. The

⁶⁴ Knapp, p. 117.

⁶⁵ Knapp, p. 120.

⁶⁶ Knapp, p. 119.

⁶⁷ Knapp, pp. 119-20.

study concludes with a reading of Wordsworth's "Yew Trees" (1803) in which the group of personifications defines a boundary which "has been rounded off into an opaque enclosure, with nothing of interest lying before or beyond it". Although bearing names like Fear, Hope and Silence they are without the corresponding thematic or narrative significance, and this leads to the real crux of Knapp's argument: they consequently "neither challenge nor assuage our sense of our own agency, but simply shrug it off"; in this sense they are indifferent to us, like "someone else's poem".⁶⁸

Both of the related concepts of autonomous poetic form and of an abstract public consciousness or reading function take their cue from the redundancy of consensus, the liberal consensus on "literature", which saturates them with meaning. This meaning is aestheticisation, which in turn secures the empirical self and its prerogative of irony or comparison. The pattern of interruption in the "Rime" occludes the crossing of the Line because what occurs there is an obscene mixing in the scandalous absence of any clear demarcation. That which has been observed in "Resolution and Independence" almost inverts this pattern since it aims to reveal a discrepancy. But as we are about to discover it would be more precise to say that a similar relation obtains between the Mariner and Knapp's reading of the Leech-Gatherer as that between Milton's Sin and Death. The relevant concept of aestheticisation here is at once a neutralisation of the disruptive character of the participation of allegory in narrative, particularly in narratives expressly of the self, which is the reduction of history, language, gender and the public sphere, *and* is also a pattern of inattention to the particular self. It serves to obscure the implication of the self in allegory, in the problematic of the sublime. It conceals the constitutive role of these modalities of the not-self, of personification, in the person.

⁶⁸ Knapp, pp. 127-9.

In an "Epilogue" to the argument, the only part of the book where the figure of Sin assumes centre stage in place of that of her first offspring, Knapp executes his "aim of deciding whether anything in Milton's intention corresponds to the eighteenth century and Romantic thematisations of personification as such".⁶⁹ He stresses both Sin's uncompromisingly allegorical character compared with previous depictions of agency in the poem, and the presence of two no less strongly dissonant elements which skew her representation away from that of "continuous allegory". Of these, the one which receives much the most attention concerns the short passage which immediately follows her account of her fall to the margins of hell and being given the key to its gates:

Pensive here I sat
Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb
Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown
Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.

(*Paradise Lost* ii, ll. 777-80)

This pensiveness of the personification, this "moment of speculative leisure", indicates for Knapp an agency in excess of the thematic role, on "vacation" from its allegorical duties.⁷⁰ The excess which in the "eighteenth century" sublime personification becomes obsession with the basis of this thematism is here disjoined from it. Knapp wants to separate Milton's *poetic* text from the ("eighteenth century and Romantic") theme of figuration, despite the admitted engagement of Milton's prose with something close to such a thematics, so that this pensiveness henceforth characterises the poem *per se* as to this extent a vacation from the prosaic or discursive. The excess of "continuous allegory" would be a "moment of empirical consciousness wholly inexplicable in allegorical terms", in which the empirical is that which is discontinuous with

⁶⁹ Knapp, p. 133.

⁷⁰ Knapp, p. 138.

and so indifferent to sublime allegory's implication in obsessive, fanatical and theoretical modes of thought.

Knapp mentions parallels between this passage and the accounts of Eve's first awakening (iv, ll. 451-2) and that of Adam (viii, ll. 286-7), but concludes that "These parallels cannot mean, I think, that Milton intends an ironic connection . . . even though the episodes are thematically related in other respects". Rather, "pensiveness must simply strike him [Milton] as appropriate to a newly created consciousness with little to remember and nothing to do".⁷¹ The important feature is that *this* pensiveness, which is that of a being with some rather dramatic things to remember and whose function in the narrative is partly to act as a kind of external memory for her no-longer-heavenly father, is not recognisably obsessive or monotonous as might be expected of a sublime personification of the "eighteenth century" type, but maintains an apparent leisured indifference to content or theme. We cannot know what Sin was thinking about, and it is in this transient opacity or illegibility of the figural that Knapp will locate the literal or empirical. What might have appeared as the Kantian liberation from arbitrary limits imposed by sensuous (allegorical) determination is situated here at the point where vacation borders on vacancy or unemployment. Pensively sitting is, after all, the typical attitude of Melancholy and of related allegorical personifications such as Mallett's Ruin, in both of whom indifference to the world is associated with the formal closure of a reflexive preoccupation.

For Knapp "The [sublime] personification is a perfect emblem of self-consciousness because its consciousness merely repeats its allegorical identity". This perfection involves a limit, that of fictionality, but this limit has another form whose status is in this respect more unclear. While the consciousness of such a personification typically is wholly reflexive, its agency

⁷¹ Knapp, p. 138.

need not be.⁷² The closure of formal self-consciousness is, we recall, a closure against the empirical and against history, and here it is also therefore a possible or occasional, perhaps an indispensable blindness toward the self as agent. (As well as characterising Coleridge's attempted exculpation of poetry from implication in historical violence this observation radicalises the danger courted by Coleridge's ethics, with its emphasis on motivation or intention.) What necessarily falls away in the repetition of identity pertains to the repetition itself. This issue becomes especially acute when someone like Coleridge focuses specifically on the status of self-consciousness as an act. But already Sin *is* this gap between agency and consciousness, just as her unprecedented femininity manifests the initial flaw in angelic homosocial solidarity.

In this way Sin's pensiveness is, after all, ironically related to that of Adam and Eve. Each responds to the force of a paternal fiat. In the case of the two (first) persons the relation to this fiat belongs to an irrecoverable past, to the severance of consciousness, of the "I", from the processes of which it is the result: "For man to know how human Life began/Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?" (*Paradise Lost* viii, ll. 250-1). Their own being is a prodigy to them, a matter of perplexity and awe - in Adam's case all too quickly to be attributed to "some great Maker then,/In goodness and in power præeminent" (*Paradise Lost* viii, ll. 278-9). "Tell me, how may I know him", Adam asks the objects and inhabitants of the visible world, but, as will become apparent to his cost, Sin is just this forbidden, confusedly incestuous and/or homosexual, never quite recoverable "knowledge" (*gnosis*) of the putative invisible father who separates light from darkness, good from evil, and masculine from feminine.⁷³

⁷² Knapp, p. 102.

⁷³ This is despite Milton's conventional diversion of the blame for the Fall onto Eve. The problem of evil in the poem is actually situated in a prior instance at the allegorical or angelic level of the machinery, at which point it is intertwined with that of gender. It is therefore incapable of approaching a resolution - in any

By contrast Sin *remembers*, she can account in matter-of-fact terms for her own creation and for her subsequent estrangement from the image of her creator. She is an archive, the self-collected narrator of derivations, the keeper of genealogies and attributor of identities, the clarifier of situations and facilitator of transitions. But she is only such because she is simultaneously, like Coleridge's German servant-girl, the unconscious vehicle of the paternal Word who is prostrated or dispossessed of herself by it. The vacancy of her pensiveness has a double, a divine and a diabolical determination. It corresponds to the dejection which is the aftermath of her fall at the conclusion of the war in heaven, and no less to that spasmodic labour, to the fulfilment of that other paternal *incipit* which will proceed apart from the participation of her conscious will.

Sin's "epistemological leisure" is no more an allegorically unmotivated flourish on Milton's part, or a subjectively motivated irruption into allegory of the sheerly empirical, than it comprises an ideal "Coleridgean" thematisation and economisation of allegory or of figure in a willing suspension of disbelief. Instead it is allegorised as the surplus of a corporeal, temporal and sexual labour, of a predestination which has no need of thought, which proceeds without her knowledge or consent, like a variety of ventriloquism or of echolalia. But this nonthematic automatism of the figure is also thematised as disfiguring (from the false double, "Lickest to thee in shape and count'nance bright," her "nether shape" becomes that of a serpent) and infinitely self-consuming, a chaotic, spasmodic circulation between conscious and unconscious (ll. 794-81). This means that Sin's "Prodigious motion . . . and rueful throes" are "excessive" in relation to their predestined result, the Death who is the prime personification of allegory or figure, in that he is the *work*. Indeed, having once

case an unlikely enough proposition - in terms of the ordinary human self with its oppositional construction of gender.

forcibly and incestuously impregnated her, an act which issues in no one definitive product but in a host of "yelling Monsters", Death begins to look somewhat irrelevant, and is reduced to impotent barracking from the sidelines until Satan appears - at which point, like Spenser's Suspect, he only gets to *look* threatening. He remains dependent on and inseparable from Sin - as she observes, "he knows/His end with mine involv'd".

Accordingly any attempt to make some construction of Milton's "intentions" a final arbiter in relation to his allegory first must be referred to that allegory, much as Sin's latter progeny, "hourly conceiv'd/And hourly born, . . . into the womb/That bred them they return". Is poetry and more generally is language divinely Adamic and amnesiac, a making new, a *poesis* ordered exclusively in terms of the oppositions and complicities of fathers with sons, of intentions with significance, or as Coleridge wished to affirm, of primary with secondary imaginations? Or is it Sinful, worldly, historical-hysterical, and fanciful?

A fruitless or alienated pensiveness such as that of Sin, lacking in pathos or any other element of psychological particularism, is allied to that which is typical of Melancholy. Milton treated the subject of melancholy, and at the same time (*pace* Knapp) thematised the question of the status of personification or allegory in "Il Penseroso" (1632), which concerns a certain kind of encounter between person and personification. Melancholy's incestuous genealogy in this poem resembles that of the Satanic trinity of *Paradise Lost*, in which she takes the place which there is occupied by Death:

Thee bright-haired *Vesta* long of yore
To solitary *Saturn* bore;
His daughter she (in Saturns reign
Such mixture was not held a stain)

(ll. 23-6)

This substitution may not be merely fortuitous, since there is good reason to associate the theme of melancholy with the experience of an absence in

relation to a limit or site of identification.⁷⁴ The poem explores the delusory notion of a contract between person and personification, as if the personification were a legal person, such that the attempt to enter into it renders the person already a slightly absurd type or personification, that of the contemplative. But even more to our purpose is the symmetry of "Il Penseroso" with its companion piece "L'Allegro", such that the commencement of each recalls while turning aside from the other. The subject of both together is the folly of the attempted definitive turning from Melancholy to Mirth or *vice versa*, the madness of the attempt to stay a turning between the two - that of the mutable, fallen world - which is out of control, to arrest a limitless, already mad circulation which encompasses and mixes Mirth and Melancholy, enjoyment and loss alike. Each treats of an endeavour or desire to secure a certain mode of pleasure at the expense of the other, but succeeds only in affirming insecurity via a detour of mixed poetic pleasure.

The option of reading these poems as simple satire, as implying a consistent focus such as a stoic ethic or the concept of an Aristotelian mean, would be dependent upon the sort of grounding which might be supplied by *Paradise Lost*, inasmuch as that poem represents a strategy for overcoming mutability, in particular for neutralising the overturning of revolution into counter-revolution. Personifications are subordinated to one of their number, to a divinity, even as that divinity and the history over which it presides is protected from its own incoherence by means of those same personifications (e.g.

⁷⁴ Freud ("Mourning and Melancholia", *PFL* vol. xi, p. 258) discusses melancholia in terms of the dissolution of a narcissistic identification with the object and the withdrawal of libido from it which results in the deployment of that libido in "an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss". In the same article Freud also stresses the role of ambivalence in the original identification and the inverse structural relation of melancholy to mania or elation, to an untoward feeling of triumph or exultation resembling at once that which Longinus associated with the sublime and the Kantian liberation theme.

the notion of a discrete Satanic agency, for the evil of which God is not responsible, but which nonetheless is part of the divine plan), much as fancy in the Coleridgean schema is required to conserve the identity-in-difference of imagination. Allegory functions in the poem as does fancy for Coleridge, and in both cases it is the instability or duplicity of the concept, a sign for Knapp of Milton's indifference, which is pressed into service.

This brings us to the second (again designated the minor) disturbing element in the allegorical depiction of Sin identified by Knapp, which concerns just this duplicity which we have been analysing. It takes the form of a comic discrepancy between tone and content in her narration which "works simultaneously against allegory *and* realism". Her "almost urbane detachment" "strangely" resembles irony at her own expense, without seeming to amount to true urbanity or ironic self-possession.⁷⁵ If Knapp balks somewhat at this strangeness this is no doubt because it consists in Sin's combination of allegory and irony such that she can be assigned to neither the ideal/fanatical nor to the contrasting empirical/ironic categories by means of which he has attempted to manage his discussion of the sublime, even while observing the breakdown of that contrast under the weight of the all too revealing "Coleridgean interest". As does the association of Melancholy with scholarship and reading in "Il Penseroso"⁷⁶ this comic element recalls the complex tone of sorrowful drollery found in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) - and, as we shall see, in the "Rime" -

⁷⁵ Knapp, p. 138.

⁷⁶ See especially ll. 89-96, where the contemplative draws scholarship into a vaguely Faustian proximity to a magical or credulous literalism:

. . . to unfold
 What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold
 Th'immortal mind that hath forsook
 Her mansion in this fleshly nook:
 And of those *Dæmons* that are found
 In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
 Whose power hath a true consent
 With Planet or with Element.

which allied melancholy to the limitlessness of intertextuality and to a consequent loss of textual authority. Such a relation of allegory to comedy involves another form of excess, another more complex and insecure mode of "liberation" than the Kantian (at least in Knapp's reading).

Far from exhibiting merely a thoughtless "indifference" to the mixing of literal and figural modes of representation, *Paradise Lost* discloses a systematic engagement with the issue. This is perhaps clearest in relation to what Knapp takes to be a contrary example, that of the mixing of angelic ("literal") and allegorical agency occurring in relation to the transformation of Raphael into a phoenix (at *Paradise Lost* v, ll. 270-4). This is treated as "thematically pointless", and so as a case of a simile which "began as a figure of speech and *turned literal*", revealing "the extremely low degree of Milton's commitment to a consistent separation of literal and figurative language".⁷⁷ It is not clear, however, that the angels should be regarded as simply literal agents. Angels fallen and unfallen occupy an analogous place in Milton's theological machinery to that which overt allegory and personification hold in the poetic. They are more archaic than human, "literal" or empirical agency; they are go-betweens, facilitators of transitions, deputies, representatives and bearers of information, whose function within a more general allegorical frame is to turn between, at once breaching and defining, opposed orders of being and modes of representation, such as those of literal and figural, or of the human and the divine.

Raphael "seems/A *Phoenix* . . . as that sole Bird/When to enshrine his reliques in the Sun's/Bright Temple, to *Egyptian Thebes* he flies", and the transformation takes place at the moment that he is translated from "the vast Ethereal Sky/ . . . between worlds and worlds" to within the bounds of the terrestrial paradise. The phoenix allegorises "normal" angelic biology since it

⁷⁷ Knapp, pp. 131-2.

reproduces or maintains itself without feminine intervention by means of death alone and by reference to the sole originating power of the sun, which in turn reproduces itself in the diurnal cycle. The phoenix (in contrast to the angels, but appropriately as it concerns Raphael's status as messenger) is the unique representative or repetition of this self-reproducing solar principle. Thus it is also an allegory of ideal representation and ideal self-hood which breaks into the narrative and partially literalises itself just as Raphael must commence dealings with Adam's "literal" agency, much as does its infernal counterpart, at greater length and with greater complexity, when Satan makes the same transition, this time from Hell.

These two allegorical episodes are contrasted modes of transition which involve a "levelling" of allegorical and literal agency. The essentially interested character of their interventions is discernible in that they function to lend the transitions an effect of continuity and authority. "Levelling" is recuperated or retrospectively motivated, in the manner of Burkean indifference, as reproduction or continuity. The "infernal" version of this process is fuller: femininity is appropriated to the allegory much as Satanic agency is ultimately assimilated to the unfolding of divine Providence. As allegory of allegory the poem narrates the structural dependence of narrative and meaning, and of the self which they support, on the interpellation of an "extraneous" allegorical, which is also a hermeneutic or interpretive, moment. This is referred to the collective, to social and linguistic systems, but also embraces history, the body, sexual difference - all that necessarily precedes and which is in no way capable of being evolved from any unique, ideal consciousness.

"Literal" narrative is interrupted by allegory, just as in *Biographia* XIII the transcendental deduction is curtailed by the letter from a friend which substitutes for it in order to prepare the place of that more definitive substitute, the "result". But this interference, this substitution of an interpretation, a modification of consciousness, for a textual moment is precisely that which

constitutes dialectical/hermeneutic progress. Discourse, including questions of texts or the text, of history and gender, becomes articulable in relation to this interference. Accordingly the transition has been played out as a valorisation of certain constructions of themes and results at the expense of the complexity of processes and derivations, the objects of a suspect "theoretical" reflection. Knapp's consistent valorisation of Death and related allegorical figures over those such as Sin and Dissemblance adheres to this tradition. In *Biographia* Ch. XIII this takes the form of a reduction of reading and so of the options allowed to readers with respect to a concept of writing as authorship. In *Paradise Lost* it appears as a reduction of Sin with respect to providential teleology.

Here Death personifies the ideal dialectical transition, the means by which the phoenix doubles itself without remainder. It stabilises the system of significations, of metaphorical substitutions, because through it the phoenix, like the "principle" of transcendental idealism, the "sum", substitutes only for its unique self, is doubled or repeated without ever ceasing to be singular and homogeneous with itself. This proper Death is the condition of life and progress, is its self-stabilising mirror image. Sin interposes between father and son to preserve this specular economy from collapse. The condition of the auto-synonymy of the phoenix, of identity in the repetition of a pure spontaneity, is amnesia or repression, whereas sin is aligned with involuntary anamnesia, although not strictly speaking with memory or narrative as such. She is the constitutive opening of ideality to history, as well as to language and sexual difference, whose nature is to dissemble herself so that like Burke's beauty she is also co-existence or contiguity, including that of more than one narration, more than one interpretation - "divisible as a Polyp, repullulative in a thousand Snips and Cuttings". Writing and authority, we are not surprised to learn, begins in Sin, in a reading or interpretation which effects a usurpation - the Satanic move as such and the one also attributed by Wordsworth to "Imagination, so called" when he also interrupts a rather muddled or disappointing journey to

effect a retrospective determination which will sustain the narrative of the development of the poetic self.

This episode in which Satan is constituted by Sin as the author of Death makes possible a contract between father and son, and a progression in the narrative. The deployment of allegory, like the "true" sublime, interrupts in order to effect a continuity, unveils in order to conceal. Death effects the corrective usurpation, the restoration which authorises the life of the subject as legitimate antecedent and thus as subsequently reproduced or resurrected. But the discrepancy between tone and narration, between the vehicle and its tenor (as in the thematised, ostensibly contained excess of Sin over Death), or of text over meaning, *shows* - and it escapes containment because it never finally shows anything. It is the appearance of the "appearing as", of the generally destabilising knowledge that the hair is borrowed, and so it is the ironisation of narrative efficacy, the internal dislocation of the mechanism which repeats itself alongside or within but not as part of the "normal" dialectics of expression and comprehension.

**“OF SENSE FORLORN”: POETRY, APOCALYPSE AND
HISTORY IN THE “ANCIENT MARINER” PARTS IV-VII**

*Dress is the symbol of the Fall, but the mark of intellect;
and the metaphysics of dress are, the hiding what is not
symbolic and displaying by discrimination what is.*

S. T. C.

Coleridge, rewriting the allegorical episode from *Paradise Lost* in the "Rime", resists an excessive privileging of Death, carries out a reduction of the role of Death which is already present to some extent in the Miltonic model. This parallels a similar reduction of the overt theme as represented by the moral of the poem, and anticipates in significant respects the strategy of *Biographia XIII*, despite a tradition, which receives some sanction from that text, of privileging the "result" in relation to its defective derivation.

For the Mariner, then, there is as yet no second throw, no revisionary possibility. Death is everywhere suffused but is impossible without being at the same time distanced or transcendent. To the extent that there is representation everything signifies death, but for that reason nothing in particular does, and so death is at once horrible and unreal, is incapable of being realised: the Mariner "could not die" (l. 262). There is a decay or corruption of order, of distinction, of life, but one in which nothing of the significance pertaining to this decay passes away. Consciousness must select a present by forgetting; if forgetting fails nothing becomes present, nothing is realised. There is a levelling or neutralising, a cognitive "democratisation" in which all representations are equally real and hence equally unreal, and in which there are none of the affects which correlate with selection or privilege, no admiration, awe, respect, love or terror, merely a generalised dread, a pervasive horror. An

infinite paralysis follows, a jamming of the ethico-ontological works - that is, until another apparently gratuitous deliverance:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying</p> | <p>The moving Moon went up the sky, And no where did abide: Softly she was going up, And a star or two beside -</p> |
|---|---|

Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt away
A still and awful red.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.</p> | <p>Beyond the shadow of the ship, I watched the water-snakes: They moved in tracks of shining white, And when they reared, the elfish light Fell off in hoary flakes.</p> |
|---|---|

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Their beauty and their happiness. He blesseth them in his heart.</p> | <p>O happy living things! no tongue Their beauty might declare: A spring of love gushed from my heart, And I blessed them unaware: Sure my kind saint took pity on me, And I blessed them unaware.</p> |
|---|--|

(ll. 263-87)

Here the object of aesthetic experience is to be found in certain optical or chromatic effects which are allied to both mockery and magic. Light and shade - the latter occasioned by the interposition of the body of the ship - yield an appearance of extreme opposites, of fire and ice, projected in delusory fashion upon the neutral or intermediate element of the water. But this is merely the setting for the more extraordinary spectacle to come. In contrast to *the* Mariner's singularity and fixity, the water-snakes when they make their appearance are plural and mobile, and in a manner which suggests the assimilation of the disintegration of decomposition ("A thousand thousand slimy

things", l. 238) to an alternative and superior, because not obsessive or paranoid, mode of integration. Their beauty and their happiness alike appear to consist in an harmonious alternation or reciprocation constituted through a play of light and shade, of colours, surfaces and traces. They become visible only as tracks, as detachable flakes of "elfish light", or as a seemingly no less detachable "rich attire" composed of colours which are also effects of light and of analogy with tactile sensation. In this way they at once give themselves to visibility, to appearance, and withhold themselves from it. The shining and flashing which is their peculiar charm is engendered in this complex motion, this rhythmic dance anticipating that of the Egyptian serpent in the *Biographia*¹ as an emblem of imaginative, unconditioned self-activity.

The water-snakes disport themselves between the diffuse transparency of the atmosphere to the moonlight and the shading occasioned by the opacity of bodies; between the tonal sublime, the deathly remoteness of a "Beyond" and the lively, sensuously beautiful appearance of tactile immediacy "Within". In these meticulously symmetrical instances of death and of life, which are at the same time those of masculine and of feminine (reinforced by the deployment of "reared" and "coiled", ll. 275, 280), it is still a question of magic and mockery, of modifications which amount to disposable conventions of attire and forms of simulation. Yet the water-snakes can be construed as also being empowered to enact or to realise the happiness and freedom which they represent to the Mariner. They paint themselves, attire themselves in colour and light but are not fixed thereby, and for that reason they escape ordinary discursive signification - "O happy living things! no tongue/Their beauty might declare" (ll. 282-3). But nor do they appear thus to compromise themselves as had Life-in-Death. Theirs is a dazzling synthesis of revelation and concealment in which consciousness is absorbed and suspended in the pure, disinterested play of

¹ *Biographia* ii, p. 14.

complementarity. What can envelope them as a supple and colourful skin can as easily fall off in hoary flakes and in either instance amounts to no more than the shine or flash of an evanescent track which becomes visible only in the overt or implied effect of its separation and abandonment.

Happiness and beauty are thus synonyms for a certain notion of freedom, for autonomy as auto-selection. Transcendental and immanent, sublime and beautiful, masculine and feminine modes of signification are alike subtended by a master narrative, that of a being which repeatedly affirms and represents itself, but which in doing so affirms itself as the invisible, supersensible, phallic "Beyond" of representation and of the empirical, and which thereby procures for itself the meaningfulness and the pleasurable reality of sensation which Coleridge will later describe in terms of "the true and original realism". The water-snakes embody a synthesis which is free because in relation to the Mariner it is gratuitous or aleatory, simply given like a roll of the dice; they are happy because they come about without presupposing the intercession of the Mariner's will, by hap, as an effect undecidably of chance or of grace. In this they recall the Albatross whose play between a "Within" and a "Beyond" they resurrect, but these latter gifts of nature amount to an apparent secondary naturalisation of selection which thereby appears innocent, no longer murderous, discriminatory, and terrible. In them what was Life-in-Death ceases to signify as contamination or disease, as cognitive impasse and as ethical disgrace, or as feminine and unnatural.

Naturalisation is thus synonymous with revision and with forgetting, specifically the forgetting of a derivation or a history, which makes possible another derivation, another history. Like the miraculous reversions and compensations of the *Arabian Nights* tales, the excess of representation is represented in terms of its severance from its source and also naturalised as activity, as the struggle or the dance which is also the life of the organism. The fixation of an indelible accusation or of persecutory reminiscence finds a

substitute in the persistent "now" of pleasurable recurrence, which, in that it engenders a "Beyond" of the subject, of depth and of spontaneity, folds into itself and all but obliterates the shameful secret of its genesis and reproduction. The persecutory insistence of feminine and textual impurity in the suffering of paralysed hyperconsciousness is anaesthetised by the substitution of this secondary pleasure. The water-snakes are free because they apparently please themselves, they give themselves pleasure in the disinterestedness of their play. They make available, as if by chance, a possible blueprint for a joyful anagnorisis in which the recognition of this pleasure devolves seamlessly into the pleasure of this recognition and both into an affirmative and potentially heady spiral of symbolic and erotic participation. Sensation or aesthesis in its older sense which belongs to the province of what later would be called the primary imagination is dependent on this secondary pleasure, this recurrent self-excitement which is referred to what is henceforth the aesthetic proper. It would cease to figure as immediate, nondialectical passivity, as exposure or victimisation, and would be assimilated to the self-activity of the instantiated, corporeal subject, would become attached to it as a modality of its being embodied, which is to say of its self-realisation.

Seeming to secure in aesthetic experience this dimension of the secondary, and with it the promise of a desirable gender assignment, makes possible the inculcation of the lesson which is also the narrative's redemptive crux. The Mariner must learn what the water-snakes seem already to embody, the art of relinquishing or sublimating under specific conditions the anxiety which is also the desire of immediate identification and of truth. He must learn the art of willingly suspending disbelief. This is the art also of committing himself to a version of the fluid, feminine, genealogical and mediating element in the form of a constructive moment of oblivion, of sleep or forgetting, but buoyed up by the active reproduction of the consciousness of his enduring difference from it in the form of his lively, organic superiority to it. Imagination is thus

linked to Eros in a manner which opens onto the textual erotics of the second volume of the *Biographia*, in which imaginative work is assimilated to an art of love as phallic mastery.

Yet this necessity of learning and of decipherment recalls the extent to which the formal symmetries of the "water-snakes" passage exclude the Mariner who is the wedding-guest at this sanctified coupling - they seem to imply at once an aboriginal remoteness and a degree of abstraction or artifice with which he has no vital relation. What is this absence of relation which is also the neutral ground upon which the colours of aesthesis are painted? We have seen something like it in Burkean indifference, which is neither pleasure nor pain, which modestly disguises or forgets its constructive and destructive role. This neutrality is that of a fictional observation *ab extra*, the condition of judgement, including aesthetic judgement, and the condition of aesthesis. So, like the account in the *Biographia* of intuitive knowledge but unlike the skeleton ship of Life-in-Death, the phenomenon of the water-snakes in the poem "neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place; but it either appears to us or it does not appear".² Nevertheless it must form part of a narrative and more importantly of a process of *bildung*, a development involving the broadest political and philosophical ramifications. It would seem that the lesson is put into practice to effect just such a connection in the blessing of the water-snakes, which may stand as a type of the numerous other benedictions, the paradigmatic acts of loving renunciation which comprise a characteristic culminating device in the verse of Coleridge and Wordsworth.³ This would answer the shooting of the Albatross, both of which are performed "unawares" because both participate in the same radical originality:

² *Biographia*, p. 139.

³ The benediction in these cases is usually a specific kind of dialectised *envoi*, a dismissal, of which the conclusion to "Tintern Abbey" will stand as a useful example.

What Kant affirms of man in the state of Adam, an ineffable act of Will choosing evil, and which is underneath or within consciousness, though incarnate in the conscience, inasmuch as *it must be conceived* as taking place in the *Homo Noumenon* not the *Homo Phænomenon* - something like this I conceive of Love, in that higher sense of the word which Petrarch understood . . .⁴

But if the status of the shooting as an act is at least uncertain, the blessing appears to be an act of a very particular kind. Finite beings, unless they are insane, do not attempt to bless in their own person, but as the inadequate representative of another whose name and performance they invoke, the One who is thought actually to be able to bless. As in the case of the repetitive structure of imagination, Coleridge is insistent that what we might call the iterability of performative utterances requires just such a theological determination. Both blessing and cursing would stand in this context as types of an immediate, ultimately divine or magical synthesis of representation and performance. Thus for a finite being to bless is to act in a manner of speaking without acting, to enact non-performance by gesturing in the direction, by signifying the lack or desire, of a divine, miraculous or perhaps chance completion. This is the form of its synthesis of activity and passivity. The Mariner here takes the part of Coleridge's subject of aesthetic reception, whom we have already encountered as the friend who is the reader of the missing deduction of *Biographia* XIII, and who is likewise dependent on a postulated genuine activity located somewhere else.

⁴ From a marginal note on Kant's treatment of *Menschenliebe*, quoted by J. H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (London 1930) p. 158. It is plausibly suggested by Muirhead to have been composed after 1812. For a useful survey of Coleridge's writings on the subject of love treated primarily in terms of "human relationship" but extending among other things to social theory, see A. J. Harding *Coleridge and the Idea of Love: Aspects of Relationship in Coleridge's Thought and Writing* (London 1974).

Accordingly in this, the poem's most affirmative moment, it is possible to appreciate the pertinence (if not the spirit) of Wordsworth's criticism of the Mariner's passivity. For Coleridge, despite all the revisionist attempts at compensation in a theory of expression, there can be *only* aesthetic reception, as the derivation of the term would suggest. The aesthetic arrives or has already arrived, it is defined by its originality in relation to both biographical-empirical and philosophical-transcendental modes. The notion of aesthetic production consequently must be deeply problematic, since to retain its integrity it must lack a language. Coleridge will refer this lack to a concept of unconscious activity, but just this type of allegorical intervention here receives critical attention, as the epigraph from Burnet reminds us. The "practical criticism" in the second volume of the *Biographia* and elsewhere is energised by and directed toward an irreducible originality of genius which is more strictly this unfathomable precedence of the aesthetic.

This is to say that the blessing possesses a primarily reflexive efficacy. The water-snakes, after all, appear to be in no particular need of the Mariner's gesture even if it were capable of realisation since they are supposedly already blessed with life, happiness and beauty. The blessing is presented as merely the immediate, spontaneous expression of another event which represents immediacy and spontaneity as such - the gushing of a "spring of love" from his heart (l. 284).⁶ In this we are invited to read the liberation of

⁶ In this connection see Coleridge's translation of Count F. L. Stolberg's *Unsterblicher Jüngling* of 1799, "On a Cataract: From a Cavern near the Summit of a Mountain Precipice":

Unperishing youth!
 Thou leapest from forth
 The cell of thy hidden nativity;
 Never mortal saw
 The cradle of the strong one;
 Never mortal heard
 The gathering of his voices;
 The deep-murmered charm of the son of the rock,
 That is lisp'd evermore at his slumberless fountain.
 There's a cloud at the portal, a spray-woven veil

depth or interiority as expressivity, as unproblematic exteriorisation. The problematic character of the act of blessing and by extension of all worldly acts matters less because what is important is not what, if anything, is done but what is represented or revealed, a motivation which is an "ineffable act", just as in poetry what must above all be expressed is precisely expression. Activity is ideally to be all but consumed in significance, in a calculus of values removed from and superior to historical contingencies and particularly to historical violence. The release and bursting of bounds accomplished in such an "act" remains innocently non-transgressive because relinquishing the demand for immediate gratification in the consumption or destruction of its object, and so forestalling the threat of the other's or its own death. It also for this reason a refusal of the insubordinate and irrecoverable ramifications of activity. Like the water-snakes the individual self is unified, is returned to its own immanence by this refusal, much as the Hebrew commonwealth was maintained by its refusal of secular history, by a periodic return to its pristine state.

Blessing replaces bow-shot, but in effect it is the Mariner who is blessed by or in the water-snakes who provide a template upon which he models his experience, a text in which he reads what he will begin to become, finding as it shimmers in the hallucinatory, reversible space and time between subject and object the organo-aesthetic form which he lovingly appropriates.⁷ It is only

At the shrine of his ceaseless renewing;

(ll. 1-11)

The divine boy, "Thou at once full-born" (l. 21), because he is fantasised as having no feminine parent, is "Life invulnerable" (l. 24). Like "The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky" of *The Prelude* Bk VI, l. 629, he is phallic, orgasmic, and autochthonous. Thus specifically masculine desire is exempted from a derivation which would imply an inmixture of otherness: "The man's desire is for the woman; but the woman's desire is rarely other than for the desire of the man" (*Table Talk* 23 July 1827 p. 50).

⁷ Coleridge's sense of a radical dependence of the self upon an image of self-sufficiency or completeness with which it would strive to identify is recorded in his rather infamous observation that "My nature requires another Nature for its support, and reposes only in another from the necessary Indigence of its Being"

because they appear already blessed, and have no need of his blessing, that he blesses them and in doing so wishfully identifies with them, thus blessing himself, approving this version of himself which he will henceforth freely and spontaneously strive to imitate.

Early in 1815 Joseph Cottle sent Coleridge a copy of his epic poem, *Messiah*, for review, eliciting a reply which anticipated a difficulty in explaining its structure to the public "so as to make it consistent with the received conception of a Poem, call it epic, heroic, divine or what you will". This "received conception" is given as follows:

The common end of all *narrative*, nay of *all*, Poems is to convert a *series* into a *Whole*: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a strait Line, assume to our Understandings a *circular* motion - the snake with it's Tail in it's Mouth. Hence indeed the almost flattering and yet appropriate Term, Poesy - i.e. poesis = *making*. Doubtless, to *his* eye, which alone comprehends all Past and all Future in one eternal Present, what to our short sight appears strait is but a part of the great Cycle - just as the calm Sea to us *appears* level, tho' it be indeed only a part of a *globe*. Now what the Globe is in Geography, *miniaturizing* in order to *manifest* the Truth, such is a Poem to that Image of God, which we were created into, and which still seeks that Unity, or Revelation of the *One* in and by the *Many* . . .⁸

Poesis regulates the relations between consecutive history and simultaneous understanding by reference to a notionally divine, extra-historical

(N 1679 , CN i). Any tendency to read this statement as merely self-accusatory should take pause at the reference to necessity, some of the significance of which we have been unfolding. See, for example, CL ii p. 1197, 13 October 1806:

This state and growth of reflex consciousness . . . is not conceivable without the action of kindred souls on each other, i.e. the modification of each by each, and of each by the Whole . . . Man is truly altered by the co-existence of other men; his faculties cannot be developed in himself alone, and only by himself. Therefore the human race not by a bold metaphor, but in a sublime reality, approach [*sic*] to, and might become, one body whose Head is Christ (the Logos).

⁸ Letter to Joseph Cottle, March 7 1815, CL iv, p. 545.

perspective. Clearly what this involves is not merely the unreformed Kantian understanding - it has been impregnated by reason via imagination and has thence waxed symbolic. The poem miniatures and, the simile suggests, completes something which otherwise could not be represented. In this account the emphasis falls not on the poem as miniaturizing a world but as reflecting a self, an image of God, which forever seeks an image of its completion in the world. Such a geography of the self, which is that of the "result" of *Biographia* XIII, is dependent upon revisionary idealisation, on the substitution of a comprehensive psychic result for a necessarily fragmentary historical experience.

As might be anticipated, however, the status of the critical reader and of imagination or poesis can become rather more complicated when Coleridge is himself the poet, and when the Mariner replaces the Messiah. In a note at the end of the first chapter of the *Biographia* Coleridge, who has been seeking to establish his priority in relation to Wordsworth in terms of literary theory and implicitly in relation to others such as Schelling in terms of philosophy, suggests that he was also his own first and best critic of his published work. To support this claim there is included, in addition to the three parodies which appeared under the name of "Nehemiah Higginbottom" in the *Monthly Magazine*, a "confounded severe epigram" on the "Ancient Mariner":

To the author of the 'Ancient Mariner':

Your poem must eternal be,
 Dear sir! it cannot fail,
 For 'tis incomprehensible
 And without head or tail.⁹

Coleridge recalls that an "amateur performer in verse" had once attempted to pass the epigram off as his, accounting for a show of diffidence in relation to meeting the poet who, unbeknownst to him, was its true author and in whose presence therefore he ought to have been truly diffident. Norman Fruman

⁹ *Biographia* vol. i, p. 28.

glosses this passage in characteristically acerbic and resourceful fashion, observing that the epigram was originally aimed at Pye's *Carmen Seculare* and agreeing with George Sampson's comment that "There is some point in saying of a *Carmen Seculare* [or "A Poem an age long"] that it 'must eternal be'; none in saying it of the Ancient Mariner', which . . . is one of the most intense and dramatically concentrated poems in our language".¹⁰ He also notes that the verse was an unacknowledged adaption from Lessing's *Die Ewigkeit gewisser Gedichte*. As annotator Fruman is scrupulously prepared to acknowledge the "genius", while feeling no requirement to protect the man "from the hazards to which he had exposed himself" by plagiarism and other deceptions.

The "amateur performer" in Coleridge's anecdote is another Mrs Barbauld inasmuch as masculine amateurism in letters is here interchangeable with feminine claims to professionalism. The reader, who unlike the genuinely diffident friend in *Biographia* XIII would cross swords with a professional by exposing Coleridge's poetic pretensions, is exposed as having deceitfully claimed as his own a letter which Coleridge has secretly sent himself. Fruman, who can hardly be accused of diffidence, in turn would also expose Coleridge, adding that in truth this letter was first addressed to a Mr. Pye, then poet laureate, and was in any case written for other purposes again and in another language by a certain Herr Lessing. But it is also true that the question asked by the "incomprehensible" poem to which Coleridge has appended the letter - "Who fires a crossbow?" - could be rephrased as "Who sends a letter?", raising the prospect that Fruman could find the result of his shot of scholarly scepticism hung around his own neck, like that of the "amateur performer". When he sends himself a letter answering his question of Coleridge, "I bid thee say -/What manner of man art thou?", does he thereby master the difference between "the

¹⁰ N. Fruman, "Editing and Annotating the *Biographia Literaria*" in F. Burwick ed. *Coleridge's Biographia Literaria: Text and Meaning* (Columbus 1989) p. 18. The remark in brackets is Coleridge's.

snake with it's Tail in it's Mouth" and the one with neither head nor tail, which only pretends to have them or borrows them from someone else? And if not, what then mediates between his own fragmentary narrative series and the result he draws from it? It might be possible, for instance, to suggest that in "lying" about the epigram in Chapter I Coleridge was telling the truth about the letter in Chapter XIII, and much else besides.

Another form in which this objection might be couched is the recognition that the most obvious point in saying of the "Ancient Mariner" that it "must eternal be" could be the simple ironic recognition of what Fruman also recognises, that it is "one of the most intense and dramatically concentrated poems in our language". But this would again be to distinguish rather hastily - as does Coleridge in relation to Wordsworth in the second volume of the *Biographia* - between the products of genius and contrasting varieties of human failure or (self-)deception. An alternative way of proceeding would be to note the way in which the suggestion of compulsion ("*must* eternal be") chimes (or "rimes") with the Mariner's unending "penance", and the corresponding intimation that this same unnatural longevity might be related to an indeterminacy or incomprehensibility in the concepts of genius and of the aesthetic.

Thus as the Mariner explains the re-animation of the corpses, "'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,/Which to their corpses came again,/But a troop of spirits blest:" (ll. 347-9). His evidence is the passing of "sweet sounds . . . through their mouths,/And from their bodies" which are compared to natural and divine musics and which, in a manner reminiscent of the illusory setting within which the water-snakes disported themselves, conjure up in the midst of the oceanic wastes nostalgic illusions of terrestrial existence amid "sleeping woods"

"In the leafy month of June". But by Part VI the situation is reversing itself as had the the crew's opinion of the Mariner's shooting of the Albatross. The corpses are invested with the power of fascination, the "glittering eye", which has subsequently characterised the Mariner, and he concludes that "The pang, the curse, with which they died/Had never passed away". He is again transfixed in a manner which is calculated to associate the helplessness of the Wedding-Guest with that of the Mariner's experience at the Line, but almost immediately relates another change: "And now this spell was snapt: once more/I viewed the ocean green". Much depends on this colon. The gloss comments that "The curse is finally expiated", but in terms of the fiction of composition by historical accretion the poem's putative "original" oral form (if otherwise accurately reproduced and if indeed these are the terms in which the poem is to be read) might have suggested in the absence of such punctuation that, like the "silence of the sea" (l. 110) the curse can be broken any number of times because it is never really broken, never actually passes away. In the poem's fictional internal history it is not impossible that the colon was inserted by the same editor who supplied the gloss.

In the face of this "revolution" of the aesthetic between redemptive and persecutory modes the Mariner appeals to the Hermit as the source of a possible practical - ethical/religious - determination. The Hermit is an appropriately archaised and self-consciously literary-sentimental locus of a sublime wisdom. An ascetic, removed in splendid self-sufficiency from (particularly feminine) society, he if anyone should be immune to the theatrical but disturbing blandishments and terrors of the aesthetic - yet he fails. The Mariner's plea to be shriven elicits the question which might have been addressed to Homer's stranger by those his appearance so disconcerted, that as to what manner or *type* of man he is, into which constituted, customary category included within the denomination "man" he will fit. That is, it elicits a swerving from the questions which the Mariner's experience seems calculated to raise and which the *Biographia* will in some fashion attempt to answer: "What is 'I' ?",

"What is a man?", "What is it to 'be' or to 'act'?", and, more generally, "What is the origin of the terminology of experience?". This initial turn on the part of the Hermit to empirical or established discursive categories as an unwarranted appropriation of experience and so of the self already repeats the Mariner's "crime", as does a little later the Wedding-Guest's object of attending the wedding which has become, even in its aesthetic guise, the symbol of just such an appropriation. Of course the Hermit does not have the benefit of Coleridge's subsequent rescriptings of the encounter such as that in *Biographia* XII: he perhaps ought to have occupied the place of the various spiritual fathers whose job it was to lay down the law - "Know thyself!" - and to provide an escape-clause in the interdiction of the possible genealogies of this knowing. But this swerve on his part is inevitable, as the unsatisfactory outcome of *Biographia* XIII bears testament. The appropriation of truth is compromised by requiring to take place in a terminology indissolubly wedded to the contingency of experience, but more seriously by the recognition that such a "wedding" is less a contract or settlement than a chaos from which neither term can be extricated entire. Hereafter the Mariner can "know" or recognise the man who must hear him on the basis of this congeneracy exhibited by the Hermit, the "one of three" who is stopped necessarily being already marked out for this inadvertence, this contingent encounter.

On first confronting the Mariner the Pilot's boy becomes mad, the Pilot falls into a fit and the Hermit averts his gaze in prayer. Considered like love as an act of the self, or (the Mariner's explanation) as the consequence of an act of a divine self (the bestowal of grace), prayer is both implicated in the conundrum which the Mariner is and, like the question which replaces it, is a means of turning aside from that quandary. This normally unconscious duplicity draws it into perilous proximity to the involuntary spasms of the Pilot and to his boy's insanity. Thus the eldest and most authoritative of this now defaced three ages of man - representatives of continuity between generations like the women

in "The Three Graves", but also, since the masculine self is at stake, of continuity within the self - is tumbled from his eminence. The prospective dispenser of judgement, and thence of the absolution which judgement permits, passes via his question from the vantage point of sober reflection to a version of the state of the enslaved reader which the friend of *Biographia* XIII says he would have become if he had not averted *his* gaze in "holy dread" from the phantom chapter in order to look to the author and the general concept of authority as *his* saviour.

To a point he also resembles one of Steven Knapp's ineffectual guardians. The boundary which the presence of the guardians marks, like that defined by the genie in the "The Tale of the Merchant and the Genie", divides or doubles in terms of semiotic equivalence and so makes representation and discourse possible. It is also therefore the place of a certain arbitrariness and aspheterisation thanks to which the sublime looks of the guardians always threaten death, but which the strategies of aesthetic self-appropriation appear able to disarm as Homer's Achilles disarmed Priam, as the potentially destructive Γνωθι σεαυτόν is disarmed by the complementary interdiction of genealogies, and as the weight of original sin is lifted by the vicarious atonement of Christ's death. The limit which is death belongs, as Burke insists, to the lexicon of sublimity: death which is always distant rehabilitates the collapse of aesthetic distance into indifference, a disfiguring drift *towards* death which never quite gets there, knowing no limit, no real death *or* life. Like the letter Coleridge sends himself and the aesthetic experience we give ourselves, death comes from afar. But the poem depicts the instrument of this distancing of death, the symbol or aesthesis which is the seat of judgement - the *hypsos* which elevates judgement *and* the beauty in which it is wedded to the world - as a rotten stump, an insubstantial amputation whose pleasing surface is treacherous, like the nostalgic hallucinations of posthumous music. The rottenness previously associated with the "slimy things" shows beneath the evanescent surfaces of

aesthetic reflection as a debased version of the profound depths or dizzy eminences of the true sublime.

Judgement and the absolution which it would make possible require aesthesis, an excess with regard to the empirical self and its objects, but one which nevertheless becomes an object for that self, just as the Mariner's experience of the water-snakes bore with it the presumption of his own detachment (ultimately to be referred to the autonomy of a transcendental self) as the neutral ground upon which representations of the aesthetic are painted. Such a forgetfulness of self is always likely to be too precipitately assigned an ethical value, as it is tempting to follow the Mariner's shipmates, the gloss, and the Mariner himself in striving to moralise the tale by opposing the "fault" in shooting the Albatross with the "redemptive" blessing of the water-snakes. But the arbitrary alternation between the two modes of interpretation, the irresistible passage of one into the other which the poem everywhere illustrates and which it thematises in the fitful operation of the curse of Life-in-Death is more correctly the condition of ethical discourse, as of discourse in general. The question "What manner of man art thou?" - the question of authority - in repeating the turn to the empirical and to history causes that not-quite- or not-yet-self to return, summons it to repeat itself not as some original, accountable act or event, some mischief or misrepresentation (*pseudos*), but as the repetition, the duplicity or *proton pseudos* it already was. Knowing neither death nor life the Mariner cannot die, and likewise his inability to present himself for judgement is sufficient to unseat judgement.

Much of the frequently remarked difficulty of the poem's narrative springs from its contradictory function as an allegory of the manifestation of the supersensible, which cannot be represented under the forms of space and time. It concerns a dimension more primordial than the communication and free repetition envisaged by Coleridge at certain junctures, and by most of the critical ~~the~~ proponents of Romantic irony. The hermeneutic relation here has a

constitutive role in effecting the identifications, the separation of powers (such as between writers and readers) by means of which subjects might be said to communicate with each other. Unless order is introduced into this sphere there can be no work of saving instruction, no framing or delimiting the ramifications of the narration in acts of homosocial exchange, and no preservation of the homo-aesthetic pleasure economy. Thus the Mariner speaks in order *not* to be understood, to interrupt the mirroring and merging, the interpenetration and aspheterisation of masculine identities. Like Sheherezade's, his speech distances the phallus much as Miltonic allegory distances God, but every such distancing is intelligible only as a repetition of the apotropaic appropriation and destruction of that which it would conserve.

Rivers, the sublime villain of Wordsworth's *The Borderers* (1797-9), sees in Montague, the man he would betray, "a mirror of my youthful self" (IV. II. 1865) and whose aim is that "My Master shall become/A shadow of myself - made by myself" (V. I. 2038-9). Similarly the Mariner recognises himself in the Wedding-Guest, having earlier been a witness to the pleasurable union of the water-snakes. The pedagogical paradigm is that of a masculine reproduction and narrative self-recovery which would not require the intervention of women, and which like the self-circling energies of reason would have excluded the *merely* contingent or historical. The authentic encounter of narrative or of a narrator with itself, a real semiotic equivalence, would impregnate and liberate understanding, would in principle constitute the immaterial, angelic "*sermo interior*". It would make judgement possible. That is, it would do so if it did not also, as we have seen, aspheterise or annihilate the empirical self by collapsing aesthetic distance. But failing such an encounter, failing what we have been calling auto-synonymy, there can be no representation, no rational realism, hence no alternative to aspheterisation. The Mariner can have no representatives or substitutes, only rivals, only reflections of the self in which that self is reduced to a reflection. In particular he cannot be

represented by Christ, whom he also must rival. In the absence of the prerequisite of communion he can be part of no community, nor can there be any vicarious atonement (a doctrine which gave Coleridge much trouble) or any atonement (punningly given by Coleridge as "at-one-ment"¹¹) at all.

Thus the Mariner speaks as if *instead* of being understood - as if there were something or someone to understand. Like the friend of *Biographia* XIII, the Wedding-Guest is the medium of this attribution, for which, if it could take place, he would be rewarded by not having to be the Mariner, the one who would imitate or replace Christ in taking the burden of the original fault upon himself. In addition the potential liberal community of subjects and the world of objects would then attain some sort of stability. The Mariner is compelled to produce a discrepancy between narration and understanding as the contradictory precondition of any understanding. But rather than merging into symbolic or imaginative harmony, the collision of the empirical narrative which ascends toward spiritual significance with the "descendental" movement of the transcendental narrative toward realisation effects only a ruinous and obscene levelling, allegorised in the poem as Life-in-Death, but exhibited in the simultaneous deformation of the narrative and voiding of the moral.

Distinct understanding resolves itself in the moral into what cannot but appear an arbitrary, somewhat repressive but far from inclusive effort of subordination. The "goodly company", the "all" who "all together pray" to the "great Father" includes "Old men, and babes, and loving friends/And youths and maidens gay!" (ll. 608-9) but conspicuously not the mothers of any of these. The only encounter with a woman and so with the problematic of its own genesis which the poem envisages other than for the purpose of specifically preventing it is horrific and irreversible in its effects. According to the letter to Cottle *poesis* or imagination is the passage between the metonymic contingencies of historical

¹¹ *The Statesman's Manual*, Appendix A, CW 6, p. 55.

and narrative apposition and the notionally more inclusive determinations of metaphorical subordination, the "all" which nevertheless bears a synecdochic relation to the narrative. The Mariner recoils from this incomprehensible wedding, from the symbolic or aesthetic foundation of a history, and thence also from understanding. He produces a discrepancy between narrative and understanding in order to overpower his rival and to attempt to resituate himself as the author of his narrative *vis-a-vis* his audience. However, the ensuing relation is like that of Suspect to Dissemblance, or of the householders to Homer's fugitive - the authority of the moral is overthrown as was that of the Hermit, but without engendering a compensatory attribution to the benefit of the Mariner, who therefore revolves endlessly between the alternatives of an unbearable gnosis and an impossible renunciation. Sublime ambivalence is just this confused relation of dependence and independence on the part of a consciousness toward something which never quite presents itself for interrogation or understanding.

The significance of the "Rime" for historical approaches to literary studies has been urged by Jerome J. McGann,¹³ whose critical historicism would retain the "Higher Critical" paradigm exhibited in the fiction of the poem's composition by historical accretion, but would displace the sacramental focus which Coleridge provides by historicising, effectively alienating or distancing it as itself an object of historical inquiry. The sacramental "Coleridgean" resolution which McGann finds in the poem would be one of its progressively accruing real or fictional historical meanings rather than "the meaning of its meanings" which it would be the function of the newly liberated critical historicism to grasp.

¹³ J. J. McGann, "The Meaning of the Ancient Mariner", *Critical Inquiry* 8, 1, 1981, pp. 35 -67.

McGann's historicist argument draws on the work of Elinor Shaffer, the significance of which it far from exhausts, however. Shaffer had found in the Mariner a "visionary character" belonging to a primitive milieu, a poetic analogue of the sources of Biblical narrative as postulated by the Higher Criticism, the development of which she traces from the middle of the eighteenth century in the writings of Herder, Heyne, Ernesti, Lessing, Michaelis, Eichhorn, *et al.*, as well as its impact on Coleridge from the mid-1790's. Just as Burke during the same period absorbed in order to attempt to overturn the principles of Enlightenment radicalism by identifying the indispensable preconditions of social experience, the Higher Criticism incorporated the demystifications of a Volney or a Dupuis into a progressive critical apologetics which sought to elaborate the historical conditions of possibility of religious experience. Shaffer emphasises that this development is not merely that of a Christian apologetics but of "the rise of the modern conception of history" in its avowedly hermeneutic, comparative and constructive form.¹⁴ This is characterised by a "new kind" of *figura*: "Now they [Eichhorn and Gabler] take their start in Revelation after the fact, in short, in apocalypse, not in 'prophecy'. Prophecy is no longer the prediction of actual events to come, but the renewed vision of the meaning of the past for the future".¹⁵ Apocalypse is the type of a meaningful relation between past and future for a finite consciousness, of the significant implication of any event in pastness and futurity: it is the type of the historical. Thus Ernesti can state that "art is *the* instrument whereby empirical history is possible".¹⁶

¹⁴ E. S. Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan' and The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880* (Cambridge 1975) p. 32. She notes, citing Lord Acton's "Kritic grew up on the lives of the Saints", that "The Biblical scholars had expounded the rules; the historians followed suit." (p. 33).

¹⁵ Shaffer, p. 138.

¹⁶ J. A. Ernesti, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. C. H. Terrot (Edinburgh 1832) p. 210, quoted by Shaffer, p. 86.

Shaffer concludes her brief discussion of the "Rime" by suggesting that it "wholly conveys the authenticity of the incredible event in the psyche of the teller, which is unassailable, and has the power of communicating itself to others".¹⁷ It is well to be clear about what is being suggested here, however. The relevant notion of "event" incorporates interpretation; in the transition from prophecy to apocalypse "epic objectivity is transformed into epic subjectivity of vision",¹⁸ a factor which we have already noted in Coleridge's interpretation of Milton. In the later eighteenth century this takes the form of a more overtly *sceptical* subjectivity which must be supplemented, as we have seen, by "poetic reconstruction".¹⁹ Further, what is conveyed (and constituted) is not understanding but authenticity, *hypnos*, communicative power itself - what Coleridge called *poesis* or imagination, as the precondition of understanding. Authenticity is not communicated simply from one to another, it is constituted in the apocalyptic moment when historians define a trans-historical "enabling milieu".

Apocalypse issues in the "relational gnosis" of a syncretist universalism. Thus

apocalyptic can be defined by Northrop Frye as "a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body". The self-generating power of romantic mythology - its 'doubling' - is the source of its ultimate success at recreating the spontaneity in necessity of primitive myth-making. Each image becomes itself by gradually passing into another and another until the web is complete and each is every other in the whole which is the end of vision. This is the complete psyche; the creating self at last encounters himself again . . .²⁰

¹⁷ Shaffer, p. 87.

¹⁸ Shaffer, p. 81.

¹⁹ Shaffer, p. 87.

²⁰ Shaffer, p. 185.

This self-recovery is "the point of confirmation", at which "Doubling in its sharpest form is the meeting of self as antithesis; epic action collapses either into absurdity (in all its romantic senses) or into the cyclical, evolutionary inclusion of all revelation".²¹ Narrative now devolves into ritual which is "transfixed at the gesture which implies the necessity of its past and future repetition".²² Shaffer finds that "Kubla Khan" stops short of this eclipse of narrative which is but "an evolutionary possibility within the poem", therefore its form cannot be regarded as strictly dialectical, rather "the sense of ultimate coherence is created . . . through the minute gradations by which the mythological ripple system of each image approaches and overlaps another".²³ History as continuous revelation would mediate between "Gnostic inclusiveness" (stigmatised by Coleridge in 1795) and its "result", its ultimate coherence in Christian orthodoxy.

But the arrest of "Kubla Khan" before the point at which the Mystery is consummated and when "The soul of the initiate encounters itself", Shaffer also observes, is what makes possible any such mediation - and therefore any dialectic. The ultimate vision of the initiate is of his own self-creation, and here Shaffer avails herself of the *topos* which we have been investigating: "The great system of all the mythologies is a hall of mirrors: each phase is self-reflection. The triumph of humanity is shattered; the image of god cannot be recreated in man once he is aware of it as self-projection".²⁴ Thus the survival of God (and of

²¹ Shaffer, p. 185.

²² Shaffer, p. 99.

²³ Shaffer, p. 186.

²⁴ Shaffer, p. 188. She quotes Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, And its Connexion with the mystic Theology of the Ancients* (1786) on the Orphic deity:

In the ancient theology of GREECE, preserved in the Orphic Fragments, this Deity, the Ἐρως πρωτολογος, or first-begotten Love, is said to have been produced, together with Æther, by Time or Eternity,

His image, man) depends upon the simultaneous affirmation and denial of vision; in short, on the mechanism of the sublime and on the constitution of aesthetic distance. As Coleridge explains in a lecture of 1818,

the great moral truths . . . show a fitness in the human mind for religion, but the power of giving it is not in the reason; that must be given as all things are given from without, and it is that which we call a revelation. And hence it is that I have ventured to call Christianity the proper supplement of philosophy - that which, uniting all that is true in it, at the same time gave that higher spirit which united it into one systematic and coherent power.²⁴

Reading, like writing, is dependent upon revelation or inspiration, upon what Schleiermacher called "divination", which must be given from without. It requires a life-saving letter from a friend who now is God, *the* Friend. The "complete psyche" would also be the imitation of Christ, the simulated interpenetration or *gnosis* of man and God which is the paradigm of the living symbol. This is why Christianity for Coleridge is the necessary supplement of philosophy: all knowledge presupposes a relation to Christ, but one which courts a danger of the type pointed out by Ferris, that the submissive imitation might supplant its original. Shaffer mentions the figure of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, a prototype of the Mariner who in many respects personifies the secular, historical intermundium for the term of which ~~which~~ he is condemned to wander, as a figuration of the avoidance of "the bold, direct

(*Κρονος*) and Necessity, (*Άναγκη*) operating upon inert matter (*χαος*.) He is described as eternally begetting, (*άειγυνητης*), the Father of Night, called in later times, the lucid or splendid, (*φανης*), because he first appeared in splendour of a double nature, (*διγυνης*), as possessing the general power of creation and generation, both active and passive, both male and female . . . he is said to pervade the world with the motion of his wings, bringing pure light; and thence to be called the splendid, the ruling PRIAPUS, and self-illuminated (*αύταυγης*).

²⁴ *Philosophical Lectures*, pp. 233-4, quoted by Schaffer, pp. 186-7.

collision with Christ".²⁶ The particular will, estranged from the Divinity as the condition of its particularity, exists as "self-contradiction, ambivalence, uncertainty, and ambiguity". The contradiction is in the relation to the divine or numerous - always too near and too distant - which incorporates the gamut of possible reactions to and modulations of the simultaneous composition and decomposition of *hypsos*. We might begin by noting, in addition to the awe inspired by revelation, by seeing, the shame of being seen, of self-revelation, which is evoked at the end of *Biographia* VI. Both of these are expressible in terms of an erotics - homosexuality and homophobia, incest and autoeroticism as well as the more sanctioned metaphors of heterosexual marriage or "Platonic" love. The same contradiction also lends itself to a thematics of apostasy and of liberation, of hegemony and subversion, and to an existential thematics involving dread or horror as well as absurdity, this last being capable of appearing under the aspect of futility and dejection or that of comedy, of a giddy exuberance and gratuitousness.

In this connection the critical historicism of McGann, Leask, or Eagleton, productive and indispensable^a as it is, cannot avoid the type of difficulty encountered by Burke's political aesthetic: the historicisation of the aesthetic is inseparable from an aestheticisation of history, and the ensuing predicament is neither properly historical nor aesthetic, but makes itself felt in the return of repressed, "monstrous" concepts of the aesthetic and of history, as well as in such phenomena as the Hermit's avoidance of the challenge represented by the Mariner, Eagleton's turning aside from the reading of Derrida, and Leask's from the historical problematic adumbrated by de Man. McGann's attempt to extricate

²⁶ Shaffer, p. 60. Citing the traditional pose of the Apostle John - Jesus' favourite, he tells us - swooning on his master's bosom having been overcome by a vision of His glory, Shaffer observes that "Vision and human love are inextricable" (p. 74) but does not take up the homo-erotic character of this love or mention its development in Gnostic tradition as a specifically homosexual initiation into visionary capability.

an autonomous critical position by distancing the problematic of the symbolic nexus merely repeats the Coleridgean strategy which is responsible for the doctrine of the symbol in the first place. The aesthetic can have a variety of politics, oppressive, liberating or both at once projected upon it. What is designated, however dubiously, in terms of the aesthetic ultimately is the possibility of these types of substitutions and recombinations and so of a history. This is not to say that it is politically neutral or ahistorical - it is nothing apart from the intersection of those investments, interpretations and appropriations, which is one reason why their analysis is indispensable, but it is wedded to none in particular except by means of its own duplicitous operations within the logic of the analysis which so determines it. At once utopian and nightmarish, the aesthetic is always implicated, worldly without being simply an object in the world, and elusive without ever being quite absent from that world or at home in another. It lends itself to the destruction and to the multiplication of worlds, genders, and selves while remaining like revolution - and like the Mariner - *sui generis*, a sign in the element which can be the occasion only of an obscure epiphany.

Accordingly, like the discourse of Milton's Sin, the "Rime" is tonally divided. Motifs of "sad wisdom", of renunciation, jostle with those of enthusiastic parabasis which, although augmented significantly by the addition of the gloss at the time of the composition of the *Biographia*, were already evident in such passages as the overtly theatrical, artificial dialogue of the "TWO VOICES" (ll. 397-429 in 1817; ll. 403-34 in 1798), that in 1797-8 were already a kind of gloss. The most obvious of the alternatives which the poem offers to the Mariner's obsessive fixation is in apparent conformity with the versions of the aesthetic of the sublime which have been discussed above, involving a chastening which correlates with respect for the law, and the experience of finitude (including society, history and sexual difference) as tragedy. In this perspective the "Rime" would comprise a post- and incipiently anti-revolutionary tract

whose function would be to distance the millennium, epiphany, and prophecy as inherently unspeakable or incommunicable, but as nevertheless instructive according to the familiar dialectic.²⁷ The poem would then also anticipate the "Kantian" or "dualistic" cultural politics revolving around the concepts of tragedy and of mystery (*pseudos*) which Leask associates with Coleridge after 1817, and this model in turn could be read into the curiously oblique modes of presentation to which action is frequently subjected in Romantic verse, such as being overburdened by reflection, ironised, insufficiently motivated or drastically overdetermined. Yet, persuasive as it is, the poem does not quite fit this interpretation. In particular, the Wedding-Guest is an unlikely subject of such a secure realisation. He departs from the Mariner "like one that hath been stunned,/And is of sense forlorn", his sad wisdom awaiting his rising "the morrow morn". The episode of oblivion between his experience of the narration as radical dispossession and the (self-)understanding in which it later results merely repeats the hiatus between the narrative and the moral within that narration, consequently it fails to legitimise this subjection as something other than a version of the Mariner's "original" crime of illicit appropriation.

Alternatively it would be possible to make a case for the abundant irony, particularly of the 1817 version, as a liberation from the Mariner's

²⁷ Coleridge suggests something of the sort in a letter to Poole (18 April 1801, *CL* ii pp. 719-20):

The professed Democrats, who on an occasion of uproar would press forward to be the Leaders, are without knowledge, talents, or morals. I have conversed with the most celebrated among them; more gross, ignorant & perverted men I never wish to see again! - O it would have made you, my friend! 'a sadder & a wiser man', if you had been with me at one of Horne Tooke's public Dinners!

This is not simply a conservative position, however. Coleridge's argument here soon embraces both the "vainglorious Scepticism" of the Jacobins and the "Aristocrats" - no doubt including Burke - who disregard "*Principle*" as being "visionary & theoretical". The root of the problem is still the division of the people into "Tyrants" and "Slaves" by the effects of trade and commerce - "Property is the bug bear".

compulsion and a derailing of the naive thematism which seems unable to distinguish itself adequately from that obsessiveness. The undeniable elements of pastiche and burlesque in the poem would provide eloquent support for such a position, which might see the text somewhat in the manner of David Simpson's study as a cautionary exercise which would furnish readers with the tools of critique, and by this means would contribute to their autonomy. Such an unsettling of hierarchies could also be associated with the ("Schellingian" and "pre-Schellingian") "monism" which, according to Leask, typifies Coleridge's aesthetic before 1817. But again this interpretation is vulnerable to the charge of repeating in another register, that of comedy, very much the same tragic structure, both being dependent here on some final anagnorisis. It would be possible to respond more in the spirit of Simpson's *"Coda"* that irony in the sense courted by the poem is not a trope which is at the disposal of a consciousness, but is rather one of the faces of that finitude which is the unsurpassable condition of consciousness, no more an object of choice or of intentional disposition on its part than is implication in a language, a body or a history.

Tragedy and comedy, the various systems of modes and genres, function in such critical overviews much as did the sublime and the beautiful in Burke: they are means of refusing this radically irrecoverable implicatedness of self and world in favour of some sort of subject-object relation. David Simpson (with important qualifications) and Leask, by means of the concepts of irony and mystery respectively, are - with considerable justification - able to attribute progressive or conservative political values to essentially the "same" textual effect. This is the enigmatic character of the apocalyptic, poetic or revolutionary sign, of an indecipherable portent which is as much exhausted as it is inexhaustible.

Imagination or poesis mediates between the universality of reason and the particularity of sensation: it breaches and defines the boundaries of the

self. If imagination were not more original than the subject/object relation then knowledge as Coleridge understands it ("Truth is correlative to Being") would be impossible. In this way a reader's understanding proceeds from a region - not strictly a region of the self - which is not itself amenable to understanding. It concerns the genesis of the empirical consciousness, the process which the "Rime" attempts to map, and exercises a compulsion which precedes and pre-emptly writers and readers. In this connection the hair is always borrowed. Narratives of authorial guilt and redemption - such as Fruman on plagiarism or McFarland on "mosaic composition" - are crossed by an alternative narrative, that of the original quotation which is discontinuous with any work or act. This qualifies not only the notion of an improper because a too direct, material or corporeal transmission which would disgrace (and "feminise") the author, but also the fiction of hygienic, innocent, transhistorical conjugations of like with like.

IV

The Poet in the *Biographia*

WORDSWORTH'S SUPERADDED SOUL

Is there not a Sex in Souls? We have all eyes, Cheeks, Lips - but in a lovely Woman are not the eyes womanly - yea, every form, every motion, of her whole frame womanly? Were there not an Identity in the Substance, man & woman might join, but they could never unify - were there not throughout, in body & in soul, a corresponding and adapted Difference, there might be addition, but there could be no combination. One and one = 2; but one cannot be multiplied into one. $1 \times 1 = 1$ - At best, it would be an idle echo, the same thing needlessly repeated - as the Ideot told the Clock - one, one, one, one, &c -.

S. T. C.

In his preface to *The Borderers* (1797, preface composed late 1796-early 1797) Wordsworth attempts to extricate moral autonomy from the sway of sublime "original causes", and at the same time to extricate his poetic voice from the ethical and epistemological problematics represented by revolution. This last term has acquired for Wordsworth, as for Burke, the sense of an unassimilable but troublingly attractive violence to the fabric of the self not less than to received notions of social cohesion. But here that self is both subjected to extra stress and afforded new possibilities of sublimation by virtue of Wordsworth's acknowledgement of a sympathetic implication in that violence as agent as well as possible victim. In negotiating this disengagement he employs a figure which suggests the Mariner's voyage in the "Rime":

When our malignant passions operate, the original causes which called them forth are soon supplanted, yet when we account for the effect we forget the immediate impulse and the whole is attributed to the force from which the first motion was received. The vessel keeps sailing on, and we

attribute her progress in the voyage to the ropes which first towed her out of harbour.¹

Wordsworth's "original causes", unlike Coleridge's, seem to form part of a temporal sequence,² and of a history which at any given moment could have been otherwise. Before examining the explanation which is offered for our forgetfulness of the freedom which would be guaranteed by this state of affairs, it would be useful to take up some other points of comparison with Coleridge's poem, which was composed at about the same time. In the play *Marmaduke*, the leader of a fraternal group of outlaws who might in reality be supporters of dispossessed legitimacy - who are borderers on good and evil - has been deceived by the sublime villain of the piece, Oswald, into committing a crime. Moreover this crime is a repetition of one which the older man had committed years before when he was similarly betrayed and to which he attributes his subsequent criminal career. The effect of the second deception is to separate Marmaduke forever from the woman he loves. Having accomplished his purpose, Oswald reveals his character and history to his young victim.

A favoured youth, he had taken passage for Syria by sea where his pride was played upon by the crew to inflame him against their captain. At this point the vessel is becalmed for many days and the water exhausted, thanks to which, he says, "I felt a double fever in my veins"; "On a dead sea under a burning sky,/I brooded o'er my injuries, deserted/By man and nature" (IV. ii. 1695-1700). Through him the captain is abandoned to certain death in the middle of this scene of deprivation. Oswald's crime of murdering this "tyrannic

¹ "Preface to *The Borderers*", W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser eds, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford 1974) vol. i, p. 80.

² Theresa Kelley in her *Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics* (Cambridge 1988) refers Rivers' motives to "the atemporal or pretemporal arena of sublime agency" (p. 80). This attribution, as the tendency of her own argument on the subject of Wordsworth's critique of the sublime would suggest, is contested in the play, although with mixed success.

Master" marks him as an overt revolutionist in a manner which the Mariner's "crime", which proceeds from a region more primordial than mastery, does not.³

Now propelled beyond all customary bounds, Oswald becomes a "speculator in morals". He claims to look beyond "the surfaces of things" (II. iii . 338): "I seemed a Being who had passed alone/Into a region of futurity,/Whose natural element was freedom" (IV. ii. 1817-9). He strives in thought to universalise himself; like Sade he pictures to himself "possible forms of society where his crimes would be no longer crimes",^{*} and thus good or even bland amiability is a provocation to him. Having attempted in this levelling spirit to reproduce himself upon Marmaduke, to make the mirror of his youthful self his "equal" once again, he foresees them "coupled by a chain of adamant":

Let us be fellow-labourers, then, to enlarge
Man's intellectual empire. We subsist
In slavery; all is slavery; we receive
Laws, but we ask not whence those laws have come;
We need an inward sting to goad us on.

(IV. ii. 1855-9)

Oswald is characterised, like the Mariner, by will. Just as Coleridge was given to associating himself, not always seriously, with Hamlet and with other Hamlet-like figures of cognitive and moral perplexity such as the Mariner, Oswald anticipates the sublime language of Wordsworth's

³ In Wordsworth's notes to the play (*PW* i, p. 342) he comments that:

The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves. During my long residence in France, while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory, that the Tragedy of 'The Borderers' was composed.

^{*} "Preface to The Borderers", p. 77.

autobiographical persona, a resemblance which the 1842 revision diminishes.⁴ This sublime has the form of the examples which we have been tracing in Burke and Coleridge:

Action is transitory, a step, a blow -
 The motion of a muscle - this way or that -
 'Tis done - and in the after vacancy
 We wonder at ourselves like men betray'd.

(III. v. 1539-43)

But here it acquires an air of Iago-like casuistry. Oswald's sublime is tilted toward a critical although not necessarily Burkean reading of ~~the~~ Godwin's "independent intellect" (III. v. 1493-6). To this end Wordsworth's discussion privileges psychology over metaphysics: rather than speculating in morals as did Coleridge in the "Ancient Mariner" he paints "the character of a speculator in morals" who thus "disguises from himself his own malignity".⁵

The difficulty which he encounters in making this psychology credible, and the probable reason for the rejection of the play by Covent Garden in 1797, is the very fault with which he later taxed the "Rime", that of a radical disproportion between motive and action. The preface responds to this point, but interestingly its emphasis does not fall on Oswald's culpability for his original crime, instead the argument concentrates on his subsequent "seduction" by the propensity for both the stimulus of violent action and the sophisms of meditation to function as anodynes for his guilt. He has "indulged a habit" of such false "moral calculations" and become addicted to violence and betrayal. He is also therefore insatiable for novelty, for the refinement as well as the magnification of his enormities. He is drawn to repeat his crimes because

in a course of criminal conduct every fresh step that we
 make appears a justification of the one that preceded it, it

⁴ Kelley, pp. 77-8.

⁵ "Preface to *The Borderers*", p. 78.

seems to bring back again the moment of liberty and choice . . . Every time we plan a fresh accumulation of our guilt we have restored to us something like that original state of mind, that perturbed pleasure, which first made the crime attractive.⁶

His "uneasiness [in being impelled to criminal action] must be driven away by fresh uneasiness [in committing it] . . . till there is an universal insurrection of every depraved feeling of the heart".⁷

It will easily be perceived that to such a mind those enterprizes which are the most extraordinary will in time appear the most inviting. His appetite from being exhausted becomes unnatural. Accordingly he will struggle so [] to characterize & to exalt actions, little and contemptible in themselves, by a forced greatness of *manner*, and will chequer & degrade enterprizes great in their atrocity by grotesque littleness in manner. He is like a worn out voluptuary - he finds temptation in strangeness, he is unable to suppress a low hankering after the *double entendre* in vice; yet his thirst after the extraordinary buoys him up, and, supported by a habit of constant reflexion he frequently breaks into what has the appearance of greatness; and in sudden emergencies, when he is called upon by surprize and thrown out of the path of his regular habits, or when dormant associations are awakened tracing the revolutions through which his character has passed, in painting his former self he really *is* great.⁸

Oswald personifies revolution, not least in his capacity to veer into and back again from an authentically Wordsworthian greatness predicated on a doubling or distancing of the self, from an incorrigible attraction to the "*double entendre* in vice". Wordsworth explains that the difference between these two doubles is also that between art and "real life". "There is a kind of superstition which makes us shudder when we find moral sentiments to which we attach a sacred importance applied to vicious purposes", but in "real life" we rarely perceive the discontinuity - we make a bull because motives and ends are alike

⁶ "Preface to *The Borderers* ", p. 79.

⁷ "Preface to *The Borderers* ", p. 79.

⁸ "Preface to *The Borderers* ", p. 78. The hiatus occurs in both surviving manuscripts.

difficult to discern. By contrast "In works of imagination" we see both. Then follows the crux of his argument:

This superstition of which I have spoken is not without its use; yet it appears to be one great source of our vices; it is our constant engine in seducing each other. We are lulled asleep by its agency, and betrayed before we know that an attempt is made to betray us.

I have endeavoured to shake this prejudice, persuaded that in so doing I was well employed. It has been a further object with me to shew that, from abuses interwoven with the texture of society, a bad man may be furnished with sophisms in support of his crimes which it would be difficult to answer.⁹

The superstitious shudder of moral and supernatural apprehension is rarely occasioned in life but is all too easily induced by the work of art, with its fictitiously evident connections, or in this case disconnections, between ends and means. By this we are lulled asleep and thence betrayed: if we are seduced in life it may be because we have first been seduced by art, by the works of imagination which occasion these shudders.¹⁰ Wordsworth would dispose of the superstition because he distrusts this artistic delimitation and exhibition of abuses which are in fact "interwoven with the texture of society". This is the locus of the *double entendre* in vice and the reason why Wordsworth employs the notion of a betrayal which does not originate in the individual self-consciousness, which is not simply a free determination of the empirical will toward evil. The problematic nature of the relation of ends to means, as when casting aside a date shell or shooting an Albatross, because it is woven into the texture of things, permits not only deliberate deception but a constant mutual seduction of which in the end no one may be aware, a libidinal insurrection or anarchy which may be our "normal" state.

⁹ "Preface to *The Borderers*", p. 80.

¹⁰ In their commentary on this passage (*Pr W*, p. 85) W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser reverse the sense. For them the seduction occurs by means of a false attribution of disconnection, an incorrect imputation of wrong-doing. The point is not materially affected, however, since it consists in establishing an unstable relation between knowledge and ignorance.

According to the fragmentary "Essay on Morals" (c. late 1798 - early 1799) the answer is not that offered by moralists such as Godwin and Paley who "attempt to strip the mind of all its old clothing when their object ought to be to furnish it with new".¹¹ Despite this analysis of the problem of evil Wordsworth's critique of the "Rime" in this connection would be that it overvalues first causes, which can be quite trivial,¹² and effects no extrication of the autonomous, self-determining consciousness, the newly clothed mind. The "Rime" is dangerously seductive because its supernaturalism assigns to art a cognitive rather than a corrective function - it shows too much, merely compounding the errors of a Godwin or a Paley by stripping away even the poor remnant which is a rationalist optimism.

The contrasting "new clothes" offered by *The Borderers* consist in the fiction of a naturalising criminal/revolutionary psychology which would promote the possibility of detaching Marmaduke (and Wordsworth) from Oswald. Theresa Kelley, whose suggestive discussion of the play is couched in terms of the various relations in Wordsworth's writings between sublimity and beauty, argues that Oswald's criminal sublime - conceived as Satanic pride in self-sufficiency which is in reality self-deception - is qualified, particularly in the 1842 revision, by the social values of the beautiful. When Marmaduke asks that a monument be raised "on that dreary waste" to record his and Idonea's story, and at the same time commends her to the care of his former "brothers", the monument "re-inscribes the figurative topography of the play with the values of

¹¹ "Essay on Morals", *Pr W* i, p. 103. The fragment breaks off tantalisingly in the middle of a description of the contribution of moral casuistry to the careers of compulsive, Oswald-like evil-doers. The essays breaks off with: "& following up this process, we shall find that I have erred when I said that". This appears to refer to the opening sentence of the essay: "I think publications in which we formally and systematically lay down rules for the actions of Men cannot be too long delayed". Wordsworth appears to have realised that in the proposition that "We do not *argue* in defense of our *good* actions, we feel internally their beneficent effect" (p. 104) he had argued himself out of his premise.

¹² "Preface to *The Borderers* ", p. 80.

the beautiful".¹³ In addition Marmaduke's concluding exile which in 1797-9 was envisaged as "and I will wander on/Living by mere intensity of thought" (V. iii. ll. 271-2) becomes in the later version a wandering in search of expiation by a man "compelled to live" by God, Kelley suggests, just as the desire for expiation assumes the existence of "someone - a god or a community - to whom remorse is due".¹⁴ But this interpretation encounters an obstacle in the terms in which Marmaduke's exile is projected. His detachment from what Kelley perceptively describes as an "hysterical" mirroring of Rivers requires that "No human ear shall ever hear me speak;/No human dwelling ever give me food,/Or sleep, or rest". The request for the monument, for which he has exchanged Idonea with his comrades, is like the moral of the "Rime", it excludes the one who speaks it. The request is also analogous to the fictional friend's request to Coleridge in *Biographia* Ch. XIII for that other monument, "*your great book on the CONSTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY which you have promised and announced*".¹⁵ The monument is not an act of the self, its erection is invoked as a performance of the "community" of "Brothers in arms!" from which he is already excluded.

The decisive point here is the character of the sublime and by extension of aestheticising resolutions in general. Act III, scene v begins with Marmaduke aestheticising his crime in terms which might have been lifted directly from Burke - "In terror,/Remembered terror, there is peace and rest." But the arrival of Oswald, the play's chief exponent of the sublime and his explanations of Marmaduke's new position draw a surprised recognition of the strangeness "That a man [Oswald] . . . Should . . . so widely differ from himself" (ll. 1568, 1570). The question over which Oswald differs is whether (i) suffering, like action, is transitory, that "Remorse . . . cannot live with thought"

¹³ Kelley, p. 89.

¹⁴ Kelley, p. 89.

¹⁵ *BL* i, p. 302.

- the thought that we are not the authors of our acts - or permanent and sublime; and whether (ii) "Fellowship we *must* have, willing or no", or pride can be self-sufficing - "The Eagle lives in Solitude!" Oswald fluctuates between feeling and thought, between an untenable solitude centred on remorse and a sociability now aligned with a reflective capacity which pre-emptes the will and decomposes the self.

Fellowship we must have, willing or no;
 And if good Angels fail, slack in their duty,
 Substitutes, turn our faces where we may,
 Are still forthcoming; some which, though they bear
 Ill names, can render no ill services,
 In recompense for what themselves required.
 So meet extremes in this mysterious world,
 And opposites thus melt into each other.

(II. 1523-30)

"Either we become/The prey or masters of our own past deeds" - but the impossibility of resolving this *double entendre* requires that only a radical silence can attempt to seal the play's action. Failing this impossible amputation of the social Marmaduke would be compelled to relive his own estrangement from himself, like Oswald and like the Mariner. What happens between 1797-9 and 1842, almost the term of Wordsworth's career as a mature poet of imagination, is this differing between an assertion of sovereignty over the self and its abrogation, the manifestation in the long dialectic between sublimity and beauty of the indifference between the two.

Mary Jacobus concludes her discussion of Wordsworth and the politics of theatricality with a passage from Shakespeare's celebrated dramatisation of regicide:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury;
Signifying nothing.

(*Macbeth*, V. v. ll. 24-8)

Wordsworth's rehabilitation and domestication of the revolutionary figure can involve deleting the sound and fury, the more overtly theatrical aspects of the sublime. The "six year's Darling" of the "Intimations Ode" whose "exterior semblance doth belie/Thy Soul's immensity" is on the cusp: he becomes a "little Actor" at the moment that he is weaned from a now disvalued maternal proximity, "Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,/With light upon him from his father's eyes!" This thespian self-activity and self-estrangement obliquely sketches in the Burkean and Coleridgean thematics of revolt as immature and self-defeating masturbatory self-inflation - "A six-year's Darling of a pygmy size!/See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies" (ll. 85-9), although in the Ode this process leads to a compensatory recognition of the never-perishing truths of the human heart. An interesting perspective on the mechanism of this attribution is offered by "The Idiot Boy" (1798), one which can, moreover, be read specifically as a reply to the "Ancient Mariner".

Wordsworth attached greater importance to this poem than is reflected in the degree of critical attention which it has received. De Selincourt observes that when Wordsworth relates in *The Prelude* his early poetic association with Coleridge he mentions only his friend's "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" in company with his own "The Idiot Boy" and "The Thorn".¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, he points out that only the "Rime" and "The Idiot Boy" were given a separate title-page in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800. This suggests in addition that Wordsworth may have envisaged it as a counterweight to the poem about which he felt such powerful reservations. Many readers found it

¹⁶ *PW* ii, p. 478. In his note to "We are Seven" (*PW* i, p. 360) Wordsworth describes the composition of "The Ancient Mariner" which, growing in length and no doubt in significance beyond expectations, prompted discussion of a future volume of poems. He continues: "Accordingly I wrote The Idiot Boy, Her eyes are wild, etc., We are seven, The Thorn, and some others".

an equally difficult work with which to come to terms. In a letter of 1802 to a young admirer Wordsworth responds to the persistent criticism of the poem that "nothing is a fit subject for poetry which does not please". He replies that pleasure may be contingent upon social and personal circumstance, but that the arbiter of that which truly is and so ought generally to be pleasing is in a human nature, the best measure of which is to be found "by stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves to[wards me]n who lead the simplest lives most according to nature".

I have often applied to Idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of Scripture that, '*their life is hidden with God*' . . . I have indeed often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society towards Idiots as the great triumph of the human heart. It is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love, nor have I ever been able to contemplate an object that calls out so many excellent and virtuous sentiments without finding it hallowed thereby and having something in me which bears down before it, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion.¹⁷

Because the lives of idiots are hidden, they reflect the lives of those with whom they come in contact. Thus "Gentlemen, persons of fortune, professional men, ladies persons who can afford to buy or can easily procure books of half a guinea price, hot-pressed, and printed upon superfine paper" who are likely to have known "false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criti[ci]sms, [and] effeminate habits of thinking and feeling" may feel aversion to them out of "false delicacy". Like the aesthetic object, idiots are the

¹⁷ Letter to John Wilson, 7 June 1802, *WCL* i, p 357. The reference is to Ephesians 3:8-9:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

and to Colossians 3:2-3:

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

appearing of appearance abstracted from its relation to that which appears, they are unprinted books, virgin pages or opaque windows conducive to a certain disinterest which here reveals the essential character of love as proceeding from and towards the supersensible, the spiritual. They unconsciously gesture beyond appearance to some corresponding hidden part of the self which is able to overwhelm artificial and merely natural aversion alike (although Wordsworth mentions in this connection that the poem does not refer to "those [idiots] who cannot articulate and such as are usually disgusting in their persons", those in whom anarchic corporeality supervenes upon spiritual or intellectual abduction). The poem is a narrative expansion of this characterisation of idiocy, a comedy of undelivered messages and lost themes.

The element of response to Coleridge's poem, much more sophisticated than in "Peter Bell", becomes legible in terms of a series of substitutions and reversals within a general narrative framework, that of an interrupted or abandoned journey which returns to the place of its departure but remains resistant to narrative appropriation. So instead of the "old Navigator" we have Johnny, the idiot boy, and instead of the Hermit there is the Doctor, a transformation indicative of a certain kind of overt disinvestment, a recourse to physic rather than metaphysics, although in the event he is *not* applied to for diagnosis or treatment. The ungovernable, irrational genetic moment represented by Life-in-Death is partly replaced by the loving mother, Betty Foy, who is also the harbour, the benevolent empiricity from which Johnny departs and to which he returns. Here an element of naturalisation compared to the "Rime" is evident, with only the reduced role of the Doctor falling under the anonymous occupational or functional nomenclature employed in Coleridge's poem. But this naturalism is, as Steven Knapp indicated (although not in relation to this poem), only partial. The surnames of Betty Foy and of Susan Gale retain a partly ironic allegorical reference to faith and the stresses to which it is subject. Susan is apparently an addition to the narrative model, but it would be more correct to say that the

position formerly occupied by Life-in-Death has been split, as in the case of the true and the false daughter in Coleridge's anecdote of the German servant-girl, between the faithful mother and the older neighbour whose apparently psychosomatic or hysterical illness occasions Johnny's dispatch in search of the Doctor. Her feminine distress is defined by an "as if": "Old Susan, she who dwells alone,/Is sick, and makes a piteous moan,/As if her very life would fail". Her cure will seek to do what the Mariner could not, and what seems not to have been attempted on behalf of the German girl, the exorcism of the curse under which finite, historical consciousness has fallen.

The permutations to which the Coleridgean model has been subjected are not yet exhausted, however. If the Doctor, who is a certain sort of reader, takes the thematic place of the Hermit, his position in the narrative is approximately that of Life-in-Death, at the equatorial point of the proposed journey, the point of definitive reversal which would introduce a critical or diagnostic element whose object would be the enabling fiction of Susan's illness, precisely the type of examination which Coleridge later describes approvingly in the sixth chapter of the *Biographia*. This point of Coleridgean speculation and "dread"¹⁸ is not attained: Betty, who comes closest, stops before the door without crossing the threshold. Conversely, together with the revived Susan in a lesser capacity, she occupies the narrative place of the Hermit, the point of understanding or judgement. But perhaps the most significant difference between the two poems is that Johnny's journey, unlike the Mariner's, has a discernable anterior reason or end: it is an "artifact". In this respect it situates itself as *posterior* to the "Rime", and as reversing the terms of its argument, as undoing what there was wrought.

¹⁸ The speculative construction of "*the body celestia*" in Chapter VI is also that of "the dread book of judgement" (*BL* i, p. 114). Thus the Doctor occupies the place not of Life-in-Death but of that pre-eminent speculative construction, Death.

The poem is replete with symmetries, repetitions, correspondences between the boy and the natural world, reversals (he rides "a horse that thinks"), onomatopoeia, assonance, alliteration, internal and forced rhyme. In terms of language it is a jocular phantasmagoria, a minor apocalypse, a humorous and sentimental variation on what Mary Jacobus has called Wordsworth's "sublime bathos". Johnny's absence is told by the clock, which, following Knapp, we would associate with poetic metre and the ballad stanza, but that telling is also aligned by analogy or metaphor with that of the moon, so negatively with the diurnal cycle, and with the owls, which are suggestive at once of wisdom and intoxication. Traditionally (as in the "Rime") they are associated with foreboding or mischance, but here are "Fond lovers" (l. 289).

The owls have hardly sung their last,
While our four travellers homeward wend;
The owls have hooted all night long,
And with the owls began my song,
And with the owls must end.

(ll. 432-6)

Johnny's prolonged absence prompts Betty to attempt to trace him to the Doctor's door, where she forgets to deliver the message which Johnny had forgotten to deliver, but more importantly that same anxiety works homeopathically on Susan, she forgets her illness so that "as her mind grew worse and worse,/Her body - it grew better." (ll. 415-6). In this "Lakeland Nights' Tale" she is "As if by magic cured". The efficacy of the journey is reflexive in character: inasmuch as it strays or loses itself it induces in those who can read it correctly a forgetfulness of self which prepares a recovery of a deeper, truer self. Unlike Burke's sublime the transition is effected by sympathy rather than terror, and it is the aesthetic of beauty which here disarms the Coleridgean sublime. But the condition of this aesthetic agency is that the life of the journey be hidden or abducted. As in the lines on crossing the Alps in the sixth book of the *Prelude* and in Mary Wollstonecraft's critical reading of the

ruined text of monarchical and patriarchal authority the absence of a defined moment of transition is momentarily occluded by an apostrophe. This time its form is not "Imagination!" (1805),¹⁹ "O France!" or "Unhappy country!"²⁰ but, initially, "Oh Reader! now that I might tell/What Johnny and his Horse are doing!" It is the wishful recognition not of the sublime unfathered capacity of the poet to father himself nor of a beautiful if presently victimised reconciling maternity, but of the dilemma comprised by the respective claims of both. Together with the second apostrophe, "O gentle Muses! let me tell/But half of what to him befell", it humorously figures the predicament of the poet who is the servant of two masters, burdened by expectations like those of Mrs. Barbauld to mediate intelligibly between the obscure and potentially all too ungentle, turbulent and virile sources of creation, and a fragile or vulnerable capacity for reception and understanding.

The poet's muses are gentle because they his "suit repel", forcing him to announce his sad incompetence to tell what transpired on Johnny's journey. He first burlesques various "romantic" possibilities, fanciful, heroic or gothic (twice), but when Johnny is found by the poet just before he is found by his mother the boy is "As careless as if nothing were" - "Of moon or stars he takes no heed;/Of such we in romances read". Nothing has transpired. When questioned by Betty Johnny's reply, the equivalent here of the Mariner's moral, is that

'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
And the sun did shine so cold!
- Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
And that was all his travel's story.

(ll. 447-53)

¹⁹ The text of 1850 of course retains the apostrophe but drops the apostrophe mark.

²⁰ Wollstonecraft, *The French Revolution*, p. 85.

Unlike the Mariner Johnny does not attempt to situate himself in relation to his story. What story there is, that of an irreducibly athematic moment, is not even his - it is "his travel's story", a story which is but a frictionless, contentless travelling forgetful of intentionality or object but not for that reason devoid of an end or destination. The journey is imagined as never really leaving the maternal space which it nevertheless serves to define as that which, inviolate itself, nourishes a moral geography and a polity beyond its borders. This space is also that of the poem in which the verbal mechanism and the anxiety of absence associated with it are assuaged by a felicitous, "magical" analogy with natural cycles. The "moral" is reduced to the minimal appearing of the "as if", of the simple substitutive and appositional operations which are the preconditions of significance and which in the poem discover intimations of a self that would be freed from natural or historical determinations just as Susan is cured of her hysterical mode of implication in her own body. Johnny's indifference to "romantic" notions of the aesthetic makes him no young philistine but situates him as an affiliate of the aestheticising concept of indifference which was announced by Burke in the *Enquiry*. His carelessness and taking no heed, like the forgetfulness which proceeds from him to encompass appropriate readers, functions as a principle of segregation of sensible from supersensible and so of conservation.

If Wordsworth had serious reservations about the "Rime", Coleridge was more than happy to return the complement when discussing what he nevertheless termed a "fine poem". In the second volume of the *Biographia* he alleges, not surprisingly, that "The Idiot Boy" is "an impersonation of an instinct abandoned by judgement", in other words "that the idiocy of the *boy* is so evenly balanced by the folly of the *mother*, as to present to the reader rather a

laughable burlesque on the blindness of anile dotage, than an analytic display of maternal affection in its ordinary workings".²¹

The shortcomings resemble those of the "best philosopher" of the "Intimations Ode", an example of "mental bombast" or a disproportion of thought to object, almost the reverse of the disproportion with which Wordsworth had reproached the insufficiently motivated Mariner. Coleridge canvasses a charge of pantheism in relation to this figure, but concludes with a general characterisation of "splendid paradoxes": "Thus you must at once understand the words as *contrary* to their common import, in order to arrive at any *sense*; and *according* to their common import, if you are to receive from them any feeling of *sublimity or admiration*".²² The confusion is such as he elsewhere attributes to "the Ideot",²³ that of man hearing a clock strike:

[who,] as it struck, he counted the four, one, one, one, one; and then he exclaimed, why, the clock is out of its wits; it has struck one four times over . . . It has struck *one* four times. Bulls almost always confusion between Logic & Metaphysics, a science of things as they *are* out of the mind.²⁴

When "Johnny makes the noise he loves,/And Betty listens, glad to hear it." (ll. 100-1) his repetitive "burr" is for Coleridge just this unproductive, non-dialectical confusion, a jamming of the works. Like Schelling's philosophy after 1817 Wordsworth's poem is a bull involving the sensation but not the sense of connection. It "extinguishes or obscures the consciousness of the [suspect] intermediate images or conceptions, or wholly

²¹ *BL* ii, p. 48.

²² *BL* ii, p. 121

²³ Letter to Henry Crabbe Robinson, 12 March 1811, *CL* ii, pp. 154-5. The passage in question is the epigraph for the present chapter.

²⁴ *CN* i, N 915. See also N 1801.

abstracts the attention from them".²⁵ The substitution of confusion for connection leaves the *ego contemplan*s stranded, and this is a characteristic fault:

[Wordsworth's] meditative pathos . . . [is] a sympathy with man as man; the sympathy indeed of a contemplator, rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate (spectator, *haud particeps* [not a participant]) but of a contemplator, from whose view no difference of rank conceals the sameness of the nature . . .²⁶

Having the characteristic stance of a "*Spectator ab extra*",²⁷ Wordsworth in the *Biographia* is like the friend of Chapter XIII, a sympathetic contemplative who, unlike Coleridge, is reluctant to get his hands dirty writing texts like "The Three Graves", "The Wanderings of Cain" or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". But the relation of "The Idiot Boy" to the "Rime" also suggests an apparently more complex version of that obtaining between "Il Penseroso" and "L'Allegro", one in which the scheme is almost reversed. For the Mariner activity is suffering and melancholia even though for the poet it liberates a marginal ironic self, a bookish hilarity. The "Idiot Boy" retains that irony and hypostasises contemplative detachment by occluding that which persecutes the Mariner, the involuntary implication of life in death, of the self in a language, a body and a history the strangeness of which can be other than magical or enchanting. Johnny's life is hidden lest it be revealed as a Life-in-Death. His free transpositions and reversals in the minimalist "moral" are like those which "The Idiot Boy" performs on "The Ancient Mariner" and *vice versa*, but the implication of the former in the more capacious ambit of the latter was already

²⁵ *BL* i, p. 72.

²⁶ *BL* ii p. 150. Nigel Leask (p. 67) finds this contemplative position to be an example of *pseudos*, of the segregation of innate sameness from social difference of which Coleridge now approves. I would suggest that the *pseudos* of aesthesis is doubled or contradictory, and that the argument between Coleridge and Wordsworth is an instance of this non-synthetic character of *pseudos*. See *TT* ii, 16 February 1833, p. 200 for a characterisation by Coleridge of this feature of Wordsworth's verse as a fault.

²⁷ *TT* ii, 21 July 1832, p.178; 16 February 1833, p. 200.

there to be read. So in criticising Wordsworth's poem Coleridge recalls the folly of the mother's empirical self in order to balance her son's idiocy within that same ideal, inarticulate, reversible maternal space which is constituted by forgetfulness of that self. But this is no resolution, no conclusive assumption of critical authority: the author of the letter from a friend in Chapter XIII is also the author of the "result", of the would-be idealising and amnesiac theory of a purged or purified imagination. In the same breath he chastises Wordsworth for not sufficiently precluding from "the reader's fancy the disgusting images of *ordinary, morbid idiocy*", and singles out in this respect the "burr, burr, burr" which unites the boy to his mother in a pleasurable, pre-Oedipal intimacy. He succeeds only in extending the sphere of Wordsworth's deluded argument to include the balancing of his own folly with that of his poetic rival.

The two-part *Prelude* of 1799 or the "Poem to Coleridge" as it was familiarly known, was written as a response to the blasting of radical hopes which resulted from the failure of the French revolution, in "these times of fear,/This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,/ . . . 'mid indifference and apathy/And wicked exultation" (ii, ll. 478-81). The poet responds by recalling the time when the Derwent would "blend his murmurs with my nurse's song" and "Make ceaseless music through the night and the day,/Which with its steady cadence tempering/Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts" (i, ll. 10-1). His claim is that "The mind of man is fashioned and built up/Even as a strain of music" (i, ll. 67-8) by this blending of human and nonhuman, of feminine and masculine. Later he is also formed by a blending of communications with two sorts of spirits: "quiet powers,/Retired, and seldom recognised, yet kind", and "Others . . . who use,/Yet haply aiming at the self-same end,/Severer interventions, ministry/More palpable" (i, ll. 73-4, 77-80). Whereas the former communed but "rarely" with the young poet, of the latter, concerned

principally with narratives of transgression, he can say "of their school was I"
(l. 80). These

Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire, and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With meanings of delight, of hope and fear,
Work like a sea.

(i, ll. 194-8)

This "working" to which the poet goes to school (and which recalls the stirring of the bed in "The Three Graves" and of the "hill of moss" in "The Thorn") concerns the investment of objects by passion or desire. The "working" of the image is the effect of its imprinting, it is its fluctuation between allegorical and literal significance. Emotions are manifested in an hallucinatory distortion of the perceptual field in which something belonging to the desiring self, to the self as such, is added to the world of objects, being phenomenised as a wrinkling, an anomaly or other disturbance of the order of that world. But this phenomenon is also added to the inner life of emotion, it is not an immediate experiencing of the self but is thematised as the phenomenisation of the adding to or the interference with the cognition of objects, with objectivity, by the subject. It is to that extent external to that emotional life, consisting of a vexation of the ordering of experience into that either of self or of world. Wordsworth refers to this in terms of the manner in which

. . . that universal power
And fitness in the latent qualities
And essences of things, by which the mind
Is moved to feelings of delight, to me
Came strengthened with a superadded soul,
A virtue not its own.

(ii, ll. 373-8)

What is superadded as (if) the "soul" of things is not the self or a part or power of the self, but the remnant or trace of the addition, of the

twinning or doubling of self and world. Like the soul it stands behind the visible face (as it would behind the "one face" of the Simplon Pass episode which later became part of the poem), informing, composing and animating it. "Working" in this sense is aligned with those decayless images, the salient fact of which is their independent persistence - independent, that is, of meanings which they may acquire only retrospectively or posthumously. In these cases it is not the image which persists, since it is not a moment of consciousness which is in question, but the "imprint" or "impress" of the image, across which a consciousness of self may be constituted.

Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
Of rural history, that impressed my mind
With images to which in following years
Far other feelings were attached - with forms
That yet exist with independent life,
And, like their archetypes, know no decay.

(i, ll. 282-7)

Such images may be impressed "collaterally", by an accident of association, "Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep/Until maturer seasons called them forth/To impregnate and to elevate the mind" (i, ll. 424-6). But even when appreciated at the time, as the poet remembers, they have the same quality of seeming already to be so remembered or recovered, somewhat like the Drowned Man (i, ll. 258-79):

How I have stood, to images like these
A stranger, linking with the spectacle
No body of associated forms
And bringing with me no peculiar sense
Of quietness or peace - yet I have stood
Even while my eye has moved o'er three long leagues
Of shining water, gathering, as it seemed,
Through the wide surface of that field of light
New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers.

(i, ll. 404-12)

Wordsworth provides an allegory of this "working" as an explanation of the "spots of time" thesis. Having come as a lost child whose precocious "ambitious hopes" (l. 300) had outpaced his capacities to the place where "the murderer of his wife" was hung, and where nothing remains but, as in "The Thorn", a shape which was "like" a grave, he encounters "A girl who bore a pitcher on her head/And seemed with difficult steps to force her way/Against the blowing wind":

It was in truth
 An ordinary sight, but I should need
 Colours and words that are unknown to man
 To paint the visionary dreariness
 Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
 Did at that time invest the naked pool,
 The beacon on the lonely eminence,
 The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
 By the strong wind.

(i, ll. 319-27)

Here the "working" is that of the woman's or girl's (l. 317) clothes as she undergoes, without perhaps being conscious of it as such, a kind of molestation by the "strong wind" (winds like rivers tend to be masculine in Wordsworth's verse). The allegorical "working" of her clothes as they fluctuate away from and against her body, at once revealing and obscuring it, here brushes against her literal "women's work" of fetching water in her pitcher. One common allegorical interpretation of representations of girls with pitchers is that of virginity or, if the pitcher is broken, of its loss. The pitcher of this girl or woman - she is perhaps on the verge of passing from one to the other²⁸ - is

²⁸ That is to say, she combines features both of Burke's Marie Antoinette and his revolution-as-whore. Wordsworth is assaying a post-Burkean, revisionary interpretation of the "working" of the image which was exploited by Burke. In this context the dropping of the thematics of prostitution and the conduct of this reworking solely within the problematics of chivalrous sublimation has an obvious political determination.

precariously balanced on her head as she "seemed with difficult steps to force her way/Against the blowing wind" and this vulnerability before the compound past-and-present eye of the poet in turn seems allegorised in that of the lowly "naked pool" (the contents of a broken pitcher?) prostrate before the "beacon on the lonely eminence" - a mirror and a lamp with a vengeance. The girl/woman "works" for the poet not by mirroring the self in any simple or direct way but in that she fluctuates between a laborious, literal, even modestly heroic because enduring intactness and autonomy which is distanced from the reflexive pathos of the poet's lonely eminence, and an allegorical, fantasmatic, almost subliminal but insistent victimhood. This second allegory or fantasy is one of literalisation, of a violent stabilisation of epistemological and sexual categories: the mirror would be constituted by first breaking it. The object must be broken of its opaque self-enclosure, its resistance to hermeneutic force, in order to be an object. The dreary, opaque literality of the girl and her work, the presumed timelessness and naturalness of her labour like that of her gender, and her consequent indifference toward the poet, holds at bay the fantasy of literalisation, of genesis or constitution, which also continues to find its support in her.

What works for the poet is her difference from herself, the irresolvable convergence of her double derivation which is responsible for her decayless persistence in separation from the associative flux. This contiguity was treated in "The Wanderings of Cain" in terms of the "Shape" which resembled Abel, both by means of its uncertain provenance and its dualistic message. But here it appears to stabilise what was more originally a difference in the self of the poet:

A plastic power

Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
 Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
 A local spirit of its own, at war
 With general tendency, but for the most

Subservient strictly to the external things
 With which it communed. An auxiliar light
 Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
 Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
 The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on
 Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
 A like dominion, and the midnight storm
 Grew darker in the presence of my eye.
 Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
 And *hence* my transport.

(ii, ll. 411-25)

The poet's own vexation by internal rebellion is distanced in the form of an "auxiliar light" like that bestowed by the beacon on the lonely eminence, a peaceful addition to a prosaic or habitual naturalism. His obeisance is then paid, according to the attributive logic of the sublime, to himself, to his eminence. It is not surprising that the poem passes immediately from this "transport" to that poetic "toil" whose produce is "that interminable building reared/By observation of affinities/In objects where no brotherhood exists/To common minds" (ii, ll. 432-5).

The passion which is indispensable to the "working" of the image and which animates his otherwise "torpid life" is first gathered by the infant "from his mother's eye", and so he becomes "eager to combine/In one appearance all the elements/And parts of the same object, else detached/And loth to coalesce" (ii, ll. 273-4, 277-80). This constitution of objects makes the mind "creator and receiver both", the process being stabilised to the extent that it is considered in an alternative light, as subject to another derivation, "Even as an agent of the one great mind" for which the (non-hysterical) mother's eye is but an ultimately dispensable intermediary. Thus the poet requires the delinquency of maternal and natural supports, even as it reduces the development of the "infant sensibility"

toward its destiny as the basis of an adult poetic vocation to a path with "broken windings" occasioned in the troubling of the mind by "obscure causes"²⁹:

I was left alone
 Seeking this visible world, nor knowing why.
 The props of my affections were removed,
 And yet the building stood, as if sustained
 By its own spirit.

(ii, ll. 322-6)

This edifice of the desiring self in its relation to objects, the "result" of this process of constitution, is sustained in the absence of its ground as if it were self-grounding or autonomous, as if it had its own spirit or soul. This is the "superadded soul" which is not in the first instance that of the self but which inhabits the dialogical or dialectical constitution of self and world as the scar of maternal absence. The autonomy in question is that of desire, which proceeds neither from the spontaneity of the subject nor from some power of attraction exerted by the object. In "The Three Graves" the mother's appetitive eye confirmed the insistence of constitutive moment, determining the collapse of the edifice of autonomy in an hysterical semiosis and in the violation of narrative economy. Here the girl/woman's "visionary dreariness", her aesthetic indifference, is by contrast troped as willed persistence and aestheticised and moralised as non-violent resolution and independence by means of a further violence, by the revelation, recognised or not, of the poet's interest in her, and so of his dependence upon a duplicity more primordial than the priapic and apotropaic fictions of bestowing or receiving.

²⁹ The broader corollary of this recognition is the breaking up of Wordsworth's great philosophical poem in relation to the role of Coleridge in its composition. The poem to Coleridge is also the poem which proceeds from him via his friend Wordsworth, whom he has urged it upon and for which he supplies notes in order that he might withdraw from it. He is the delinquent figure of philosophical capability which substitutes for a grounding of its composition.

The principal "characteristic defect" of Wordsworth's poetry which Coleridge identifies in the *Biographia* is that the "natural tendency of the poet's mind . . . to great objects and elevated conceptions"³⁰ is thwarted by the obstinate determination of his empirical will to minutely depict the empirical, the accidental and the historically particular. This sets at defiance Coleridge's insistence that poetry is essentially ideal, generic and representative.³¹ As a consequence Wordsworth confuses poetry with prose, means with ends, and pleasure with truth, effecting "a small Hysteron-Proteron".³² He commits violence upon "that state of association, which actually exists",³³ which is to say upon social realities. He makes it impossible to suspend disbelief, inviting an exercise of (non-aesthetic) judgement, a destructive and potentially politically destabilising cognitive intrusion into aesthetic experience.

The effects of this poetic procedure may be developed under two heads: that of the subject or "characters", and that of objects. In relation to characters Coleridge detects "mental bombast", which is an Oswald-like perversity and destructiveness. By elevating what was low - Pedlars and the like - Wordsworth's literalist naturalism and primitivism revolts against social fact, exhibiting the democracy which should be purely immanent. His socially and ontologically anomalous figures are foreign bodies liable to disrupt the fine articulations of social and intellectual discrimination which infiltrate and organise the polity. Where objects are concerned the resulting difficulty is that "when the successive acts of attention have been completed, there is a

³⁰ *BL* ii, p. 119.

³¹ *BL* ii, p. 46.

³² *BL* ii, p. 131.

³³ *BL* ii, p. 130.

retrogressive effort of the mind to behold it as a whole".³⁴ The emphasis falls on effort; there is a Barbauldian "*biographical* attention to probability, and an *anxiety* of explanation and retrospect" .³⁵ The resultant experience of reading is "like taking the pieces of a dissected map out of its box". Coleridge's alternative revives the maxims of Chapter XII:

The poet should paint to the imagination, not to the fancy; and I know no happier case to exemplify the distinction between^e these two faculties. Master-pieces of the former mode^A of poetic painting abound in the writings of Milton, ex. gr.

The fig tree, not that kind for fruit renown'd
But such as at this day to Indians known
In Malabar or Decan, spreads her arms
Branching so broad and long, that in the ground
The bended twigs take root, *and daughters grow*
About the mother-tree, a pillar'd shade
High over-arched, and ECHOING WALKS BETWEEN:
There oft the Indian Herdsman shunning heat
Shelters in cool, and tends his pasturing herds
*At loop holes cut through thickest shade.*³⁶

Coleridge comments, echoing the earlier interdiction of the degrees of appearing of self-intuition, that "such co-presence of the whole picture [is] flash'd at once upon the eye, as the sun paints in a camera obscura". His allusive argument here exhibits just this compression and immediacy, the flash of the thunderbolt which would pulverise Wordsworthian prolixity with its tendency to unravel the social and spiritual fabrics. Its poetic form is synaesthesia, "the *vestigia communia* [common print or impression] of the senses, the latency of all in each" or aspheterisation of the senses, which is also the sublimated pantisocracy^C which was to feature in texts such as *On the Constitution of Church and State*. This is effected in the passage from Milton in relation to a virginal but prolific maternal space, ramifying asexually but receptive and sheltering to the

³⁴ BL ii, p. 127.

³⁵ BL ii, p. 129.

³⁶ BL ii, pp. 127-8. The quotation is from *Paradise Lost* IX, ll. 1101-10; the emphases are Coleridge's.

herdsman at its margins whose pastoral care thence extends beyond this feminine enclosure.

Coleridge singles out the "ECHOING WALKS BETWEEN" as the arteries of this latency, the exponent of which is the "magical *penna duplex*" - apparently a mechanism for writing with two pens with one motion.³⁷ This exemplifies the stimulation of vision by sound which "may be almost said to reverse the fable in tradition of the head of Memnon, in the Egyptian statue".³⁸ This colossal statue near Thebes, in reality that of Amenhotep III, was said to produce a musical sound when its head was first struck by morning sunlight. Tradition has it that this was the voice of Memnon, the son of Tithonus, in Homeric legend killed at the siege of Troy by Achilles, greeting Eos (Aurora), his mother. Such a greeting, suspended somewhere between language and music,³⁹ is an intellectual birth like that of Sin from the head of Satan, a comparison appropriate to the passage from darkness to light or metastasis, to the highly fraught ambivalence of phenomenalisation. Here the "ECHOING WALKS" of the old pastor in the first volume are transformed: the generation of daughters is absorbed, as in pantisocracy^c, into a common maternal substance which ensures that the ideality of this exotic imaginative locus is unable to bleed into the temporally dispersed Wordsworthian mode. Thus the birth is refigured by Coleridge's appropriation of the Memnon legend in terms of the alternative Miltonic *topos* of non-transgressive parthenogenesis, the authorised declension of Raphael, who "seems/A *Phoenix* . . . as that sole Bird/When to enshrine his reliques in the Sun's/Bright Temple, to *Egyptian Thebes* he flies".

³⁷ See *BL* ii p. 128 n.

³⁸ *BL* ii, p. 129.

³⁹ According to Chapter XV musicality is one of the earliest symptoms of poetic power: "The man that hath not music in his soul' can indeed never be a genuine poet" (*BL* ii p. 20).

To this point Coleridge's argument, although elaborate and arcane, is clearly the sort of mobilisation of the concept of imagination from the Chapter XIII "result" which was to be expected, but there is more. This fig tree is also that to which, after the fall and after their first post-lapsarian dalliance, Adam and Eve repair, seeking, says Adam:

Som Tree whose broad smooth Leaves together sowl,
And girded on our loins, may cover round
Those middle parts, that this new comer, Shame,
There sit not, and reproach us as unclean.

(*PL* ix ll. 1095-8)

The distinction between the faculties of fancy and imagination is exemplified in the fig leaf which this passage is and which imagination is also: something which conceals but does not remove the perils and attractions of a worldly genesis. Without the synaesthetic or aspheterising latency of imagination, there would be no suspension of judgement. Instead a collision of fact and fiction would occur in which, Coleridge trusts but cannot establish, "A faith, which transcends even historic belief, must absolutely put out this mere poetic Analogon of faith, as the summer sun is said to extinguish our household fires, when it shines full upon them".⁴⁰

What Coleridge and Wordsworth both dispraise in each other is their at least partly involuntary but not necessarily unconscious implication in radical poetic violence toward established modes of reception and intelligibility. If Coleridge's figural supernaturalism assigns to art a cognitive function, showing too much of what should be hidden, then Wordsworth's literalist naturalism also affronts expectations in such a way that things appear which should not, breaching the bounds of the aesthetic. They by different roads at length have gained the self-same bourne, but without in the process producing a

⁴⁰ *BL* ii p. 134.

consensus. In terms of the cross-purposes of these artistic and political programmes neither is exclusively radical or conservative, but the indifference within and between the two is irreducible to either of the twin aestheticising concepts of neutralisation or of a transitional moment toward some *tertium aliquid*. It is nearer instead to the temporal dispersal of the subject of Schelling's system, to its historical decomposition into the multiplication of selves, positions and interpretations.

CONCLUSION

This is what distinguishes the artist from laymen (those susceptible to art): the latter reach the high point of their susceptibility when they receive; the former as they give - so that an antagonism between these two gifts is not only natural but desirable. The perspectives of these two states are opposite: to demand of the artist that he should practice the perspective of the audience (of the critic -) means to demand that he should impoverish himself and his creative power - It is the same here as with the difference between the sexes: one ought not to demand of the artist, who gives, that he should become a woman - that he should receive.

* * *

*It is to the honor of an artist if he is unable to be a critic - otherwise he is half and half, he is "modern."
Friedrich Nietzsche*

Coleridge's anecdote of the lady at the waterfall from "On the Principles of Genial Criticism" derives from an episode which took place at the falls of Clyde in August 1803 while on a tour with William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Her journal account of this incident,¹ which purports to reproduce Coleridge's relation of it immediately after it took place, differs somewhat from its retelling in the 1814 essay, although it agrees in the main particular with a version he gave of the incident in 1827.²

¹ D. Wordsworth, *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt. 2 vols, (London 1952) vol. i, pp. 222-4.

² Other versions of this story include -

(i) notes for the 1808 "Lectures on the Principles of Poetry", *CW* 5 vol i, p. 34: "In a Boat on the Lake of Keswick, at the time that recent Rains had filled all the Waterfalls, I was looking at the celebrated Cataract of Lodore, then in all its force and greatness - a Lady of no mean Rank observed, that it was sublimely beautiful, & indeed absolutely *pretty*."

(ii) notes for the 1811-12 "Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton", *CW* 5 vol i, p. 188, which contain the reminder, "Example of the man at the fall of the Clyde"; in John Payne Collier's notes of the lecture, p. 193 of the same volume, it reads:

"He was surveying the fall of the Clyde and was ruminating on what epithet could be best applied to it & after much deliberation he pitched upon Majestic as the proper one - While he was still engaged on it a gentleman & lady came up in neither of whose faces bore much of the

Coleridge . . . began to talk with the gentleman, who observed that it was a majestic waterfall. Coleridge was delighted with the accuracy of the epithet, particularly as he had been settling in his own mind the precise meaning of the words grand, majestic, sublime, etc., and had discussed the subject with William at some length the day before. 'Yes, sir,' says Coleridge, 'it is a majestic waterfall.' 'Sublime and beautiful,' replied his friend. Poor Coleridge could make no answer, and, not very desirous to continue the conversation, came to us and related the story, laughing heartily.³

In this earlier version the emphasis falls not on the gentleman's terminological imprecision but on the consequent dissolution (in laughter - recalling the attempted symphony of "The Wanderings of Cain" which "broke up in a laugh") of an anticipated structure of exemplification and of judgement, and of Coleridge's hasty misidentification of a fraternal spirit, his too precipitate delight in identification of and with "his friend". In the later essay the entire incident has become a negative example and the relative positions of the parties to the conversation appear to have become reversed and to be otherwise modified. The two masculine conversational partners have coalesced so that Coleridge is now self-identified in the primary, Adamic and authoritative function of naming or legislating. The respondent's place, which was Coleridge's, is occupied by a

stamp of wisdom & the first word the gentleman uttered was "It is very majestic" - Coleridge was much pleased to find a concurrent opinion & complimented the person on the choice of his term in la warm language. "Yes Sir" replies the gentleman, "I say it is very majestic, it is sublime & it is beautiful and it is grand & picturesque" - "Aye" added the lady, "it is the prettiest thing I ever saw." Coleridge was not a little disconcerted."

(iii) from *TT* ii, 24 June 1827, p.60:

Some folks apply epithets as boys do in making Latin verses. When I first looked upon the Falls of the Clyde, I was unable to find a word to express my feelings. At last, a man, a stranger to me, who arrived about the same time, said: - "How majestic!" - (It was the precise term, and I turned round and was saying - "Thank you Sir! that *is* the exact word for it" - when he added, *eadem flatu*) - "Yes, how very pretty!"

³ *Journals* i, pp. 223-4.

lady with whom he seems not to have conversed and who now speaks - or is ventriloquised into a semblance of speech - only to appear to disqualify herself from legitimate speech or judgement. She serves as the repository of the failure of the earlier attempt at the fraternal consolidation of identities. Revisionary schemas of this type which issue in such self-identification or self-recognition comprise for Coleridge certain of the preconditions of the operation of method, of theory and of rationality.

It should also be said that the context of Dorothy Wordsworth's narration of this event repays close attention. Some of the key terms of the story - "majesty", "delight", and not least, "lady" - had just previously been employed to describe an occasion of her dissent from the unanimous judgement of her male companions. The majesty of the cataract had occasioned "delightful feelings" in her, but yet she also finds that a disturbing element, "at first unnoticed", begins to make its presence felt. This chiefly consists in "a neat, white, lady-like house" situated "very near to the waterfall" and on the side of the river opposite to a grand house, a "lady's house - for the whole belongs to a lady", and to the pleasure gardens in which their party is then taking its pleasure. "William and Coleridge" did not dislike the house but while it contributes to their pleasure it seems strangely to provide an obstacle to Dorothy's enjoyment, although, as she admits, "it was a very nice looking place, with a moderate-sized garden, leaving the green fields free and open". A remark by Coleridge in a lecture of 1818 helps to clarify the likely basis of the disagreement:

To the idea of Life Victory or Strife is necessary - As Virtue not in the absence of vicious Impulses but in the overcoming of them/ so Beauty not in the absence of the Passions, but on the contrary - it is heightened by the sight of what is conquered - this *in* the[? figure/fugue], or *out* by contrast - ⁴

⁴ 1818 Lectures on European Literature, Lecture 13, *CW* 5, ii, p. 224.

The obtrusive proximity of the house inscribes a version of femininity as "lady-likeness" into the scene in a manner analogous to Coleridge's later account of his conversation with the lady. Here a decorative or picturesque element evincing in Dorothy's description both moderation and freedom inhibits for her the appropriative, enlivening and expansive movement of the aesthetic experience - even though, in truth, the whole belongs to a (real) lady. To the image of domesticity represented by the small house divided from the seat of feminine property and power by the falls, however, she has just contrasted another source of delight, the sight not of ladies but of "lasses in gay dresses running like cattle among the broom" who, on their way to church, "waded across the stream, and, when they had reached the top of the opposite bank, sat down by the roadside . . . to put on their shoes and cotton stockings, which they brought tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs".⁵ In this tiny fragment of pastoral privileges of class and sex are challenged, however momentarily, by these women who combine a modicum of property (of a particular kind) and hence independence or self-reliance with a vaguely improper or at least unladylike but for that all the more exhilarating mobility.

The narrative also proceeds to locate an alternative centre of interest to what has been recognised as a site of primarily masculine identification:

The basin which receives the fall is enclosed by noble rocks, with trees, chiefly hazels, birch, and ash growing out of their sides whenever there is any hold for them; and a magnificent resting place it is for such a river; I think more grand than the falls themselves.⁶

In this context the anecdote reads very much like an exposure of the pretensions of exclusively male-centred forms of identification, but one which is careful to spare William, who is permitted still to wander around naming

⁵ *Journals* i, p. 222.

⁶ *Journals*, p. 223.

things.⁷ Moreover, although we cannot know in what manner Coleridge had settled in his mind the precise meanings of the terms "grand, majestic, sublime, etc." during his conversations with William on this trip and how much Dorothy (like the German servant-girl) was able to overhear, in the light of the definitions later recorded by Coleridge which may well recall those of the earlier conversations her choice of the expression "grand" appears susceptible to an interpretation in terms of a partly covert polemic. Coleridge asserted that,

When the parts are numerous and impressive, and are predominate, so as to prevent or greatly lessen the attention to the whole, there results the grand.

Where the impression of the whole, i.e. the sense of unity, predominates so as to abstract the mind from the parts - the majestic.⁸

Once again Dorothy Wordsworth's account exhibits an element of resistance to what might be regarded as excessively hasty or overbearing modes of incorporation or totalisation. Enclosure is redefined in the image of the river basin as a largely non-proprietary inclusiveness, as what the context suggests might be an active receptivity rather than either renunciation or retentiveness. The village lasses make their own rather unorthodox road toward a comprehensiveness which retains its claims to divinity but in doing so lay their own claim to a certain liberty and, at the same time, to a certain precariousness.

It remains true that the argument in this passage is played out in terms of majesty and grandeur. The aesthetic high ground of beauty which, according to Coleridge in the same letter, involves "the perfection of form", "when the whole and the parts are seen at once, as mutually producing and explaining each other as unity in multitude", and of sublimity, in which is found "neither whole nor parts, but unity as boundless or endless allness", like

⁷ E.g. *Journals*, p. 224.

⁸ Shawcross (p. 309) cites these definitions from T. Allsop's *Letters &c., of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1836) vol. i, pp. 197-9.

William, is ostensibly exempted from criticism. A further reading of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals and letters would do well to examine the extent to which her intervention is in fact susceptible to such a circumscription, and whether they are not in some way apprehended in the majesty/grandeur couple or the comically uncomprehending "gentleman" and his non-complementary double.

[See Hartman's essay in Bloom ed. *Deconstruction and Criticism* and Johnson, p. 34, on a poem of Wordsworth]

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