"Lovely Shapes and Sounds Intelligible"
Kristevan Semiotic and Coleridge's Language of the Unconscious

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ABSTRACT

Romantic literature's preoccupation with subjectivity, and the nature of the self, is recognised as influential on modern conceptions of consciousness, and in particular as a precursor of psychoanalysis. This thesis examines Coleridge's understanding of consciousness, as expressed in his prose, to demonstrate that he theorised a language of the unconscious; a non-arbitrary, authentic language that remains inaccessible. By comparing this idea with Julia Kristeva's theory of Semiotic language, the thesis will show that this language is indeed recognised in her psychoanalytic theory as a product of the unconscious. Most importantly, it will show that while Coleridge's supernatural poetry laments the inaccessibility of unconscious language, Kristevan theory demonstrates it to be present in that very poetry.

La préoccupation qu'avait la littérature de l'ère du Romantisme de la subjectivité et de la nature du soi est maintenant reconnue comme ayant influencé les conceptions modernes de la conscience et, en particulier, comme un précurseur à la psychanalyse. Cette thèse examine ce que Samuel Taylor Coleridge comprenait de la conscience, tel qu'élaboré dans sa prose, pour démontrer qu'il a théorisé un langage propre à l'inconscient; c'est-à-dire un langage non-arbitraire et authentique qui demeure inaccessible. En comparant ce concept avec la théorie de Julia Kristeva sur le langage sémiotique, cette thèse démontrera comment ce langage est, en effet, reconnu dans la théorie psychanalytique de Kristeva comme un produit de l'inconscient. Plus important encore, elle démontrera que, quoique la poésie surnaturelle de Coleridge pleure l'inaccessibilité du langage inconscient, la théorie Kristevienne atteste la présence du langage dans la poésie même.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis arises from my interest in the relationship between the supernatural poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and twentieth-century psychoanalysis. It is commonly suggested that Romanticism, in its privileging of the subjective, was a precursor to psychoanalysis - that it created the condition in which analysis of the psyche became a suitable topic for science – hence Clifford Siskin's comment that "a self written by the literary innovations of a Wordsworth became normal for Darwin, Freud, and every 'developing' individual" (14). While this is clearly true, I use the word 'relationship' because I am also concerned here with the way in which psychoanalysis can clarify our retrospective reading of this poetry – less as a means of finding a new meaning, and rather as a means of clarifying meaning in the context of the original production.

The context of Romantic literature within the History of Ideas situates it in a post-enlightenment reaction against rationalism and empiricism. 'Romanticism,' then, is an ideology rather than a historical period, and it is an ideology that still informs our understanding of ourselves today. Abrams' The Mirror and The Lamp articulates the expression of this movement in literature at the turn of the nineteenth century: the metaphor of his title[1] illustrates the way in which understanding became seen less as a product purely of experience, as a reflection of learned knowledge onto new situations, and more as an illumination of those

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1 The metaphor is derived from W. B. Yeats' contention that "It must go further still: that soul must become its own betrayer, its own deliverer, the one activity, the mirror turn lamp" quoted on Abrams' title page.

new situations by intuitive, a priori cognition. Within the bounds of literature, then, this movement is characterized by a move from mimetic modes of expression to creative ones – to a search for a means of using imagination to create authentic expression.

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century criticism of Coleridge's poetry tends to read it aesthetically, as an experiment in imagination, rather than trying to derive meanings – intended or otherwise - from it. Indeed, Thomas Moore in 1817 described "Kubla Khan" as "utterly destitute of value" (Jones & Tydeman, 75), while Hazlitt said that "it is not a poem, but a musical composition"(65). John Livingston Lowes writes extensively on the genesis of the poems <u>The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</u> and "Kubla Khan" (in his 1927 <u>The Road To Xanadu</u>), and certainly returned them to critical attention, but he does not ultimately assign either of those poems with any meaning: he characterizes their creation as an aesthetic bringing of beauty out of chaos. Further, the difficulty of finding meaning in the supernatural poetry has frequently led to an assumption of the influence of opium on Coleridge's work[2], again assigning it visionary status but designating it devoid of specific meaning.

The rise of hermeneutic treatments of these poems in the twentieth century tended to centre on psychoanalysis from an early point: Maud Bodkin focused on Jungian Archetypes in the <u>Rime of the Ancient Mariner</u> as early as 1934 and G.Wilson Knight's <u>Starlit Dome</u> brings what he calls an "interpretative method" (xi) to the poetry that includes psychoanalytic elements in its largely Christian

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2 By such critics as, for example, Schneider, in <u>Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan</u>.

reading. These two hermeneutic standpoints – psychoanalysis and Christianity –

have become prevalent in the exegesis of the supernatural poetry, and coalesced

in Robert Penn Warren's New Critical essay on the Mariner, which assigns strict

meanings to elements of the poem in order to attempt to construct an allegory. As

he says regarding this type of analysis, he is sympathetic to the reader's "desire

that poetry have some significant relation to the world, some meaning" (Halmi,

Magnuson, Modiano 697). This desire for meaning has led to psychoanalytic

readings as diverse as Anne Williams' suggestion of the Mariner as a horror story

articulating Coleridge's hatred, or fear, of the female, to Camille Paglia's reading

of the Mariner as a "male heroine" (322) partly representative of Coleridge's

supposed sexual ambiguity, and his homoerotic desire for Wordsworth[3].

Jerome McGann's Romantic Ideology calls for a reassessment of

Romantic criticism, and for a qualified return to historicism: he points out that

Romantic literature is indeed a product of an ideology, and most particularly of an

understanding of the very meaning of, and reason for, poetry. Hence an

understanding of the poetry must be informed by an understanding, and critical

assessment, of the ideology in which it is situated. Siskin's comment, quoted in

my opening paragraph, shows how much we have in common with Romantic

ideology, and how much modern understandings of self and society are derived

from Romanticism. Further, as McGann points out

    our present culture has advanced, for better and for worse, well beyond

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3 Further to this, Paglia variously characterizes Wordsworth as Coleridge's superego and father
figure (320) and always as villain.

those forms of consciousness which came to dominance in the Romantic

Period... At the same time, the critical representation of those forms of

consciousness in our ideological apparatuses continues to suggest the

opposite. (13)

I will, then, be bearing in mind in my examination of Coleridge, the specific

ideology and theoretical basis from which his ideas and his poetry arise. My

intention is to use the modern inheritance of Romanticism – psychoanalysis – in

discourse with the poetry, not to construct meaning from it, but to discover its

inherent preoccupations.

This thesis, then, will examine Coleridge's supernatural poetry through the

lens of psychoanalysis not with the intention of imposing symbolism onto the

poetry, but rather with the intention of making more apparent the meaning that is

already there, of exposing an articulation that is already inherent, and that can

more easily be seen with the use of psychoanalytic vocabulary. My reading of the

supernatural poetry views it primarily in the light of Coleridge's theological and

philosophical views, and surmises that Coleridge's poetry expresses his belief in a

language of the unconscious. McGann quotes Mario Praz as saying that

The Romantic exalts the artist who does not give a material form to his

dreams – the poet ecstatic in front of a forever blank page, the musician

who listens to the prodigious concerts of his soul without attempting to

translate them into notes. It is romantic to consider concrete expression as

a decadence, a contamination. (23)

I will be arguing the direct opposite to this – that Coleridge theorized that the language of the unconscious did, in fact, exist, but that that language could not be expressed in a conscious, material world. In Chapter One, I will discuss Coleridge's theological and philosophical theories, by examining his prose - both his published work, and those notebooks collected and edited by Kate Coburn, to prove that this theory of an unconscious language runs through his understanding of the self. I am particularly interested in his writings on his own dreams, and his conception of how they express the unconscious, and how that expression is formulated.

This understanding of an unconscious language clearly aligns Coleridge's theory with post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory, and with Jacques Lacan's idea that the unconscious is constructed in and by language, and so my second chapter will move to an examination of that theory and its descendants to discuss the parallels between the two. In particular, I will be showing how Julia Kristeva's conception of Symbolic and Semiotic language concurs with Coleridge's idea that the unconscious has its own language. Kristeva's ideas derive from the Lacanian model of the formation of the self, and from his theory that language is one of the primary structures that creates a differentiated self, and subjectivity. She suggests that the part of consciousness repressed by this process in fact retains its own language – the Semiotic- which cannot be entirely annihilated by our birth into the Symbolic, and instead erupts into our controlled communication as unruly and uncontrolled expression. While I suggest that

Kristeva's and Coleridge's conceptions of unconscious language are similar, it is clear that there are some key differences: the most important is that Kristeva regards Semiotic language as a constant presence in our usual, Symbolic expression, while Coleridge believes the language of the unconscious to be, by its very nature, completely inaccessible. I also show how Coleridge's understanding of morality as absolute, and divinely ordained, problematises his conception of the unconscious: the unconscious clearly contains much that has been repressed, and his belief in this repression as morally, and not sociologically, derived, suggests that the inaccessibility of the language of the unconscious causes him ambivalence. This differs from Kristeva's secular conception of repressed desire as necessary only for differentiation, and civilization. Both agree, however, on the unconscious as the location of the pre-differentiated, unified self, and as the location of the language of this self.

In my final section, I will show how Coleridge's theories are expressed most obviously in his poetry, in a reading of "Kubla Khan," The Rime of The Ancient Mariner, and "Christabel." Thematic readings of these poems, particularly the latter two, show how Coleridge's understanding of the construction of self appears to be congruent with Kristeva's. By examining the language of the poems I will show how (in "Kubla Khan" in particular), Coleridge laments his inability to access the language of the unconscious; this understanding of the poems is based on the poetry itself, and on Coleridge's stated theory and ontology. Kristevan theory, then, is a light with which to illuminate

the ideas that characterise Coleridge's supernatural poetry, and that clarify the meaning that already inheres there. It also, though, brings to light a fact that contradicts Coleridge's own perception of his poetry. By Kristeva's more structured definition of Semiotic language, and its place in poetry, Coleridge is in fact capable of its expression – although he laments his inability to use it, his poetry certainly contains elements of unconscious language.

The poem from which this thesis arises is "Kubla Khan," and in particular this image of the ideal poet:

> Weave a circle round him thrice
>
> And close your eyes with holy dread
>
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
>
> And drunk the milk of Paradise. (L51-54)

It is this image that has so often been interpreted as merely aesthetic – as a beautiful vision. While modern criticism generally concedes that this is a poem about poetry, the pathos of this image is rarely recognized – it is the poet that Coleridge thought was impossible, the poet that he wanted to be. I will, in this thesis, use modern psychoanalytic theory while continuing to situate the poetry within Coleridge's own ideology in order to reveal this lament for the language of the unconscious, and I will further reveal how the floating haired poet was much nearer to being Coleridge than he was able to concede.

Chapter One

Coleridge's Prose: The Divided Self and The Language of The Unconscious

The question of the relationship between poet and poetry, between creator and creation, underpins the work of the Romantic Era. Coleridge addresses this question in his poetry, his criticism and his philosophy. Underlying even this question, however, are the changing ideas about what it is to be, to live: hence changing notions of selfhood are at the heart of his work. In this Chapter, I will be discussing how Coleridge's prose works - his publications and his private Notebooks and letters - show the way in which he came to understand the self as divided not only between subject and object, but between conscious and unconscious existence. Coleridge's desire for organic unity leads him to examine the way in which consciousness cannot, in fact, be unified: he ultimately attributes this division to the nature of man as divided from God. This understanding of an authentic but inaccessible self is important in its relation to his understanding of language precisely because the search for authentic expression -- for what Wordsworth called the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" - is so intrinsic to the preoccupations of the period. Coleridge's understanding of the unconscious as divine allies it to his theory of an original, natural language, which emerges from his readings on Adamic language. It is, however, in his copious recording of his dreams that his belief in a language of the unconscious finally becomes most apparent.

Two texts tower over the landscape that we designate 'Romanticism':

Wordsworth's The Prelude and Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. That both these works deal with the connection between poesis and the development of the individual is testament to just how central to Romantic thought is the notion of selfhood. Coleridge's work consistently seeks to define the relationship between creation and creator - as he suggests in Chapter 14 of the Biographia: "What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other" (II, 15). This idea of poet and poetry as identical is, then, a defining aspect of Romanticism, and perhaps mostly clearly expressed in retrospect by M.H. Abrams' analogy of the poet as container, and the poem as the liquid that gushes forth from the container (47). Hence the poem, as fluid, conforms to the shape of the poet. The 'shape' of the poet, then, is central to his creation, and Coleridge's preoccupation with philosophy means that his prose is as concerned with ontology as it is with literary creativity; and so it is to philosophy that I will turn first to trace the development of Coleridge's particular understanding of selfhood.

Charles Rzepka, in The Self As Mind, states that "the Cartesian assumption that the self is identical to mind provided, ultimately, the condition of the possibility of Romanticism" (24), and while Coleridge's understanding of selfhood is much influenced by Kantian philosophy and its relations, it is underpinned by Descartes' rationalist hypothesis. Rationalism, in its divergence from materialism, privileges the subject, and thus subjectivity, so that the object is less important - or rather less comprehensible - than is our personal experience

of the object. So Romantic poetry concerns itself less with describing the actualities of nature, and rather describes the experience of communing with nature, and the feelings engendered by the encounter. When Coleridge acknowledges that "Des Cartes was the first philosopher, who introduced the absolute and essential heterogeneity of the soul as intelligence, and the body as matter" (<u>Biographia Literaria</u> I, 129) it is to express his concern with the problem that arises from this system - the apparently divided nature of the self. If the self resides entirely within one's mental awareness, then the very fact of embodiment alienates the subject not only from others, but from objective understanding of itself. It questions the assumption of empirical ideology that, as the material is describable, so we are capable of revealing our selves through language. Thus the very nature of poetry as a means of describing anything 'actual' is in question, as every articulation is an attempted communication of the subjective, and the immaterial.

Seamus Perry, in his article "Coleridge, the Return to Nature, and the New Anti-Romanticism: An Essay in Polemic," describes how it is this preoccupation with interiority that so informs both modern and contemporaneous criticism of Romantic poetry, and of Coleridge in particular. As eighteenth-century empiricism finds a new voice in twentieth-century realist and historicist criticism, Perry suggests that

> this anti-romanticism is a distrust of the 'literary,' of 'poeticalities'
>
> altogether, which are conceived as the fruit of an unhealthy introverted

self-consciousness, and a faith instead in a literature that somehow

embodies the discretely sensuous in an art of natural self-evidence - what

Leavis celebrated as the 'there'.... A desire for palpable truth over merely

'poetic' beauty might be thought of as having a precedent in Wordsworth's

'Preface' to <u>Lyrical Ballads</u>, or, more equivocally, in Keats: 'What the

imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth'; Shelley, who had a 'weak

grasp upon the actual' (<u>Revaluation,</u> 206), is 'the ideal of what a poet

should be' - Trelawny's praise for him - only for the dreaming nineteenth

century.

As Perry shows, however, criticism of the subjective nebulousness of Romantic

expression was at the heart of Romanticism - "the dreaming nineteenth century" -

as it developed, and is intrinsic to the disagreements that arose between Coleridge

and Wordsworth after the publication of <u>Lyrical Ballads</u> in 1798. Perry quotes

Wordsworth's comment of Coleridge that "there was in Coleridge a sort of

dreaminess which would not let him see things as they were," and follows this

with his own observation: "that Coleridge had an inaptitude for the actual seems

universally acknowledged."

This 'dreaminess' derives precisely from Coleridge's preoccupation with

matters outside his immediate sphere of perception. The importance of

metaphysics, in particular, persists across all areas of Coleridge's thought, and his

insistence on his philosophical (and theological) views within his theories of

practical criticism has also met with much disparagement. James C. McKusick,

in <u>Coleridge's Philosophy of Language</u>, suggests that some Coleridge critics (he

particularly cites Murray Krieger and Frank Lentricchia) "make counterfactual

claims about his practical criticism when it is really his philosophical stance they

object to" (88), and quotes Krieger's claim that poetry speaks (or rather should

speak) "phenomenologically, not metaphysically" (88)[4]. McKusick goes so far as

to suggest that Lentricchia believes that "Coleridge is responsible for everything

that is wrong with modern criticism" (89). This seems to be borne out in his

quotation of Lentricchia:

> From Coleridge to Mallarmé, and from Yeats to Cleanth Brooks, Philip
>
> Wheelwright, and Northrop Frye, a dualism very like that between symbol
>
> and allegory is carried through as a distinction between the poetic or
>
> literary and the scientific or ordinary kinds of discourses. Brooks told us
>
> that it was heretical to paraphrase; within the perspective afforded by
>
> romantic tradition we may come to feel that the urgency in his injunction
>
> is motivated by a long-standing romantic need to protect a quasi-religious,
>
> ontological sanctuary from all secularizing discourses that would situate
>
> literature in history. (89)[5]

Lentricchia's distinction here chimes with Perry's analysis of anti-romantic

criticism, and his suggestion that its "distrust of the 'literary,' of 'poeticalities'

altogether," derives from the view that they "are conceived as the fruit of an

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[4] McKusick is here citing Murray Krieger, <u>The New Apologists For Poetry</u>, Minneapolis: U of
Minnesota P, 1956. p68n

[5] This citation is from Frank Lentricchia, <u>After the New Criticism</u>, Chicago: U of Chicago P,
1980. p6

unhealthy introverted self-consciousness." It suggests a desire for poetry to leave

the dubious waters of the Kantian 'noumen' to the philosophers, while poets (and

critical theorists) confine themselves to the comfort zone of the

phenomenological. This perspective, however, assumes poetic creativity and

personal belief are separate spheres – for Coleridge, this separation is simply not

possible. As Jerome McGann puts it, "Ideology is a central (as opposed to a

"supporting") factor in Romantic works" (92) and therefore to situate literature in

history, in this case, should be to acknowledge that this period is characterised by

the desire for a unifying discourse between art, science, theology and philosophy.

It is the role of ontology in creativity, and in poetic expression, that

underpins Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's poetry. Their disagreement

arises from their different emphases on the role of the 'inner' self, and the example

of Wordsworth's Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads as a precedent for

"palpable truth" over "merely 'poetic' beauty" strikes at its heart. The original,

1798 version is written on behalf of both poets, and states their intentions thus:

> [The poems] were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the
>
> language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is
>
> adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the
>
> gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist
>
> in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to
>
> struggle with feelings of strangeness and aukwardness... while they are
>
> perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural

delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents. The desire for truth, then, is clear - both poets wish to find an authentic means of expression, to rise above poetry that Coleridge sees as simply elaborately transliterated prose (Biographia, Chapter 1), and that Wordsworth describes here as "inane phraseology." It is their understanding of the means of authentic expression that divides them, however: Coleridge's discussion in Biographia Literaria shows that while he seeks to express a psychological truth based on an attempt at interiority and empathy, Wordsworth's expression approaches the truth from the exterior, from close observation and literal reproduction. In a letter to Sotheby in 1802 on this matter, Coleridge writes

> In my opinion every phrase, every metaphor, every personification, should have it's [sic] justifying cause in some *passion* either of the poet's mind, or of the Characters described by the poet - But *metre itself* implies a *passion*, i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader - and tho' I stated this to Wordsworth, & he has in some sort stated it in his preface, yet he has [not] done justice to it, nor has he in my opinion sufficiently answered it. In my opinion, Poetry justifies, as *Poetry* independent of any other Passion, some new combinations of Language, & *commands* the omission of many others allowable in other compositions...[6]

For Coleridge, then, accurate representation of the speech patterns, the "language of conversation," of a certain class is not a means of expressing the authentic

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[6] This is quoted by Engell and Bate, in their notes to Chapter 14 (10)

"passion" of the "mind" - Wordsworth's method amounts to ventriloquism, not truth. The very structure of poetry itself, for Coleridge, is the means of achieving authentic expression - of the psychological, the "passion" as it is felt subjectively, not as it is witnessed objectively. The subjectivity at the heart of Romanticism binds the poets in their aims, but the means of expressing this subjectivity divides them.

If, for Coleridge, the self is the source of truthful expression, then what underlies (is 'meta' to) self - and to knowledge - is God. Discussing the prerequisites for an absolute theory of knowing - "principium cognoscendi" (282) - he purports that the result of both the sciences (those concerning the objective and the subjective)

> ...or their equatorial point, would be the principle of a total and undivided philosophy... In other words, philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy. We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD. (283)

Knowledge begins in self and ends with God, as does consciousness. This is intrinsically linked with Coleridge's desire for unity, for wholeness - God represents a circular, perfect whole that is unattainable for the divided self of the mere human. In a letter to Thomas Clarkson in 1806, he states that:

> God is the sole self-comprehending Being, i.e. he has an Idea of himself, and that Idea is consummately adequate, & superlatively real - or as great

men have said in the throes and strivings of deep and holy meditation, not

only substantial or essential, but super-substantial, super-essential. This

Idea therefore from all eternity co-existing with, & yet filiated, by the

absolute Being...is the same, as the Father in all things, but the impossible

one, of self-origination. He is the substantial Image of God, in whom the

Father beholds well pleased his whole Being - and ...he... as delightedly

& with as intense LOVE contemplates the Father in the Father, and the

Father in himself, and himself in the Father. But all the actions of the

Deity are intensely real or substantial/therefore the action of Love, by

which the Father contemplates the Son, and the Son the Father, is equally

real with the Father and Son; & proceeds co-eternally both from the

Father and the Son - & neither of these Three *can* be conceived *apart*, nor

confusedly - so that the Idea of God involves that of a Tri-unity. [7]

While this is a discussion of Coleridge's movement away from Unitarianism, it

also illustrates, as Haven puts it, that "Coleridge has conceived of God as an

archetypal consciousness, and presented the persons or elements of the Trinity as

aspects of that consciousness" (126). He further points out that Coleridge's

poetry presents the relationship "between the worlds of natural perception and

supernatural vision as a relation between two states of mind, and it is essentially

this relation which his conception of trinity attempts to define" (126). Embedded

in Coleridge's perception of God, then, is his perception of consciousness: only

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[7] As quoted by Richard Haven, in <u>Patterns of Consciousness</u> (125)

the divine can be completely conscious of and to itself, and thus unified. The state of being human necessitates a disunity not only between mind and body, but between states of mind - an entry in his notebook dated seven years before his letter to Clarkson wonders: "Man but an half animal without drawing - but yet he is not meant to be able to communicate *all* the greater part of his being must [be] solitary - even of his consciousness."[8] So, just as his theory of poetry rests on accessing and expressing the subjective truth that comprised the experience of self, so his philosophical theories return again and again to the hidden self; to what we would now term the unconscious. Most particularly, Coleridge returns to his frustration with our inability to communicate either with or from our own unconscious.

Thus Coleridge's understanding of Kant's phenomenon - the perceivable and knowable - and noumenon - the unperceived intuitive, and therefore unknowable - elides into his understanding of the self known only to God, the self below rational perception of itself. As only God is entirely self conscious, only God is all knowing, and thus the human self is divided not only into mind and body but into conscious and unconscious. Coleridge writes in his Notebooks

> But yet tho' one should write Poetry, Draftman's-ship & Music - the
>
> greater and perhaps nobler certainly all the subtler parts of one's nature,
>
> must be solitary - Man exists herein to himself & to God alone - Yea, in
>
> how much more only to God - how much lies <u>below</u> his own

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8 as quoted by John Beer in <u>Romantic Consciousness</u> (43)

consciousness. (Vol 1, Note 1554)

This musing on forms of language, or of symbolic systems, again suggests that while his public concern is with language that can authentically express the subjective self, so his more private thoughts dwell on the apparent impossibility of another language, or symbol system, which can communicate the life that is hidden, the unconscious.

McKusick shows how Coleridge's idea of a divided language, as an extension of the divided self, derives from his education in theories of language. His interest in etymology, in clarity and in the poetic forms of metre and rhythm are concerns with the language of man as he is now, with the conscious and perceiving mind. However, McKusick suggests that his familiarity with Plato's Cratylus underlies Coleridge's belief in an essential, pure language, uncorrupted by civilisation, and thus a language providing access to the essential truth. The ideas of the Cratylus evolved into the Judaeo-Christian belief in 'Adamic' language - a pre-lapsarian language of perfect expression. Among the sources from which it arises, the most obvious is Genesis, and the story of Adam's naming of the animals - this is best expressed by Thomas Aquinas: "The first man gave names to the animals, as it says in Genesis II. But names must correspond to the nature of things; therefore Adam must have known the nature of all the animals, and by the same logic, he must have had knowledge of all other things" (9)[9]. The reflection of Coleridge's idea that only God has total knowledge of all

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[9] McKusick is quoting Aquinas' Summa Theologica, with his own translation.

things, even an individual's consciousness of himself, is clear - the suggestion is

that the inaccessibility of this language, and its correspondent hidden part of the

self, is a consequence of the fall. The influence of this theory on Coleridge's own

idea of language is evident in this discussion of Shakespeare:

> Even so [it is] in the language of man and that of nature. The sound *sun*,
>
> or the figures S, U, N, are pure arbitrary modes of recalling the object, and
>
> for visual mere objects not only sufficient, but have infinite advantages
>
> from their very nothingness *per se*. But the language of nature is a
>
> subordinate *Logos*, that was in the beginning, and was the thing it
>
> represented, and it was the thing represented. Now the language of
>
> Shakespeare (in his *Lear*, for instance), is a something intermediate, or
>
> rather it is the former blended with the latter, the arbitrary not merely
>
> recalling the cold notion of the thing, but expressing the reality of it and,
>
> as arbitrary language is an heirloom of the human race, being itself a part
>
> of that which it manifests. (109)[10]

What Coleridge here terms "the language of nature," a language that "was the

thing it represented," is clearly his representation of Adamic language "that was

in the beginning." Coleridge's idea of natural language - as he puts it "doubling"

in language - is the binding together of the "inner and outer forms of a given

utterance" and the use of this type of language is the mark of poetic genius.

Hence only such a genius is able to employ these two languages - the original,

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[10] McKusick's source is <u>Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism</u> Ed. Thomas M. Raysor, 2 Vols.
    Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1930. I, 209.

unspoiled natural language - the Adamic - and an evolved, civilised language that became the arbitrary. The formation of these languages, and the relationship between them, parallels Coleridge's ideas of the formation of consciousness, particularly in their relation to God. Adam's language is complete, organic and non-arbitrary because of his privileged relationship with God, reflecting the idea of the hidden, unconscious part of man known only to the divine. Further, as Adam is characterised as the original human, he is also the root of all etymology, but the intervention of the Fall places a barrier between modern language and its ultimate origin. As man has been cast out of Eden, and undergone civilisation, so language has undergone a continual evolution so that it is irrevocably split from its origin, from natural language.

Thus the model of original and evolved language clearly resembles the formation of the self, and the formation of civilised society: the development of a consciousness that ultimately separates the evolved self from the original self, thus resulting in the ontological division at the centre of Coleridge's philosophy. He says in the Logic, "For what is a fact of all human language is of course a fact of all human consciousness" (McKusick, 67), and for Coleridge language and knowledge, and his studies of them, remain utterly intertwined. This is exemplified by his emphasis in the Biographia on etymology as a means of understanding language, culture and human progress. Similarly, his studies of children - or at least his notes on his observations of his own children - show how he sees acquisition of knowledge and acquisition of language as consubstantial.

This is clearly shown in his description of how his son Hartley reacts to a

reflection of a landscape, as related in the Notebooks (I, no 923):

> I shewed him the whole magnificent Prospect in a Looking Glass, and
>
> held it up, so that the whole was like a Canopy or Ceiling over his head, &
>
> he struggled to express himself concerning the Difference between the
>
> Thing & the Image almost with convulsive Effort. - I never before saw
>
> such an abstract of *Thinking* as a pure act & energy, of *Thinking* as
>
> distinguished from *Thoughts.* [11]

Coleridge here entirely conflates the process of thinking and the process of

'struggling for expression' - the concept and the language of the concept.

Theories of ontology, of perception and of language are not separate for him, and

at the heart of all of them is his personal conception of the noumenon, related to

the unconscious and to God. His conception of the circular, organic wholeness of

God is entirely bound up with divinely perfect knowledge, self knowledge, and

truthful expression.

This direct association – both ontologically and theologically - of the

unconscious self with the pre-lapsarian self ultimately creates a dissonance in

Coleridge's understanding of the unconscious, in that it does not allow for the

presence of the imperfect, or the immoral. While I will show in my discussion of

Coleridge's dream notes that he observes how desire is repressed into the

unconscious, the anxiety that this causes is present in both his Notebooks, and his

poetry. This conception of the unconscious as the receptacle of the perfect, pre-

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[11] This passage may be found in McKusick (74)

lapsarian self is in tension with his recognition of the desire repressed to the same

psychic space: this is because he conceives the morality that represses desire to be

divinely, rather than sociologically, derived. This ascription of the desires for sin

as immoral in themselves[12] clearly differs sharply from later psychoanalytical

views of repressed desire as a product of socially imposed, and defined, morality.

While considering Coleridge's theory, and prose works, it is important to

bear in mind the audience to whom different works were addressed. The

Biographia Literaria, Statesman's Manual and Logic are written with the clear

understanding of a public readership, an audience, while the letters are addressed

to specific readers. It is clear from Coleridge's biographers that he suffered a

great deal of anxiety regarding the reception of his ideas, and we must therefore

consider these sources as analogous to his conscious, public self. Thus we must

concede them as written with an awareness of the impression they create, as

censored, as what we would now (rather confusingly) term 'self-conscious.' In

the material of his Notebooks, then, we can access Coleridge's private self, his

uncensored thoughts and perhaps even - in his recording of his dreams - his

unconscious. It is certainly in this consideration of his dreams that we can find

further evidence of Coleridge's idea that the unconscious has its own language.

While Coleridge's public work discusses ontology and the divided self in

a pragmatic, academic way, his notebooks suggest a preoccupation with this

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12 Despite the influence of Paradise Lost on Coleridge's work, this conception of sin seems to
   diverge from Milton's: Milton's characterisation of the sexual relationship between Adam and
   Eve before the Fall (in Book IV) is of innocence and purity. It is only the knowledge of sin
   after the Fall that changes it – hence sexual desire in itself is not sinful, and is not confined to
   the post-lapsarian.

subject, and betray a level of anxiety not evident in the published discussions. Coleridge clearly expresses his desire for unity, and the way in which this desire is frustrated on a linguistic and ontological level, in the inexpressibility of the self. This frustration with the very isolation and incompleteness of the human condition is clear in passages such as this, from 1808:

>...I am not then so unconscious of talking, as when I write in these dear ... Books, I am of the act of writing - So much so, that even in this last minute or two that I have been writing on my writing, I detected that the former Habit was predominant - I was only *thinking*. All minds must think by some *symbols* - the strongest minds possess the most vivid Symbols in the Imagination - yet this ingenerates a *want, ποθον, desiderium*, for vividness of Symbol: which something that is *without*, that has the property of *Outness* (a word which Berkley preferred to 'Externality') can alone fully gratify/even that indeed not fully - for the utmost is only an approximation to that absolute *Union*, which the soul sensible of its imperfection in itself, of its *Halfness*, yearns after, whenever it exists free from meaner passions, as Lust, Avarice, love of worldly power, passion for distinction in all its forms... (Coburn, 9-10)

Coleridge's frustration with written and spoken language is palpable in this passage - the symbol that expresses outwardly is only "an approximation" - it reflects the "imperfection," the lack of completion of the soul, or of the self to be fully aware. He attempts, at times, to use different languages to attain less

imperfect expression, and states his belief that Greek is a superior language for 'outer' expression of the 'inner.' He is consistently frustrated, however, by all the languages he uses - Coburn describes one attempt thus:

> There follow a few lines in Greek letters which transliterate into a mishmash of Italian, German, English, with a few Greek words; they describe what happens in those half-waking, half-dozing reveries connected in his case with opium and guilt. No translation of that mishmash can convey sharply enough the painful immediacy and intimacy of the manuscript: "He encourages a deception and cerebelline fantasies through the night; awakening into consc[iousness] in the morning early, and sometimes so as not to remain awake, he hopes for a delusion - Then anxiety, stifling breath." (14)

Particularly relevant in this passage is not simply Coburn's description of Coleridge's attempt at subjective expression with a "mishmash" of language and symbol, but the quotation in which Coleridge describes himself in the third person - he places himself in the object position in order to express the subjective. This seems to arise specifically from his condition - of being between sleep and wakefulness - as it is reminiscent of some of his writing on dreams; Jennifer Ford, discussing Notebook 35, overtly states this when describing Coleridge's depiction of dream characters, dubbed "dreamatis personae." The Coleridge writing in the Notebook (and having the dream) experiences the Coleridge in the dream as one of these objective characters, and as Ford puts it,

argues that dreamatis personae are distinct characters within the dream
because dreams invoke a split between the self as an object and the self as
a subject. In dreams, conscience becomes the '*real*' antithesis of the 'I',
and the dream and its characters oppose this conscience. The split
between the 'I' who dreams and the 'I' in the dream is further occasioned
by the motives and passions of the dreamer. (37)

The "motives and passions" herein include Coleridge's romantic and sexual
feelings for Sara Hutchinson, a frequent theme of his dreams; in fact "he believed
that they were not merely about or connected with Sara, but that 'whole dreams'
were her" (54)[13]. Thus the dream, and the 'I' in the dream, express desires that the
'I' who is dreaming attempts to repress. The *dreamatis personae* oppose
conscience because they represent those parts of the self repressed by conscience,
and the dream becomes a battleground within which the repressed desires of the
unconscious attempt to overthrow the censorious conscience[14] of the conscious
mind. That the repressed unconscious is represented by Coleridge in the third
person – in "a split between self as subject and self as object" - further illustrates
his idea of the self as divided. The nature of the desire a̲s̲ unconscious is
supported by his comments on some of his specific dreams: one of his Notes
describes a dream image within which "the ideas of full Sail modify... the
impression of the naked Masts" (II, 2061). Despite the clear sexual imagery,
Coleridge says of such dreams that "so very strangely do they instantly lead to

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13 Ford is here referring to Note No. 2061in Notebook II
14 What we term here 'conscience' could be said to the part of the psyche Freud termed 'superego'
   – in either case, this type of dream is clearly an attempted rebellion against it.

Sara as the first waking Thought," as his conscious waking mind so successfully

represses the nature of the dream. Of those dreams whose sexual nature he is

aware, Coleridge writes in code (even in these private Notebooks), modifying

language even as the dream itself does in its discourse between conscious and

unconscious.

Ford's reading of Coleridge's developing understanding of dreams shows

the growth of his understanding that the self is divided not just into subjective and

objective, but into unconscious and conscious, where the unconscious is the

deepest level of subjective self. Importantly, she shows that it is through his

dream studies that Coleridge "moves toward a recognition of the existence of an

ontological fracture between waking and sleeping existences," and this is

supported by his question to himself in Notebook III: "The Conscience - the

Unity of Day and Night - Qy are there two Consciences, the earthly and the

Spiritual?" (Coburn, 20) Coburn succinctly summarises the process thus:

> When Coleridge theorised, using his own dreams as evidence, he
>
> abolished all the old superstitious thinking about dreams as having any
>
> sort of independent content, and in some tentative way guessed that an
>
> understanding of the dreams of the night would illuminate hidden mental
>
> processes of the day. (20)

The process appears to have been more tortuous for Coleridge than this quotation

might suggest, however - his study of the unconscious (or as he later called it, the

subconscious) by observation of his dreams was by its very nature a difficult

process. His attempts to record his dreams retrospectively are partially successful, despite his recourse to code, and his tendency to suffer from nightmares. Most importantly here, it becomes clear that his observations led him to theorise a form of language manifested only in dreams, and even more elusive on waking than the content and meaning of the dream itself.

In a Notebook Memo entitled 'Language of The Dream,' written in May 1818, Coleridge states that

> The language of the Dream = Night, is)-([contrary to] that of Waking = the Day. It is a language of Images and Sensations, the various dialects of which are far less different from each other, than the various Day-Languages of Nations (Coburn, 20).

While he stresses here that dream language is imagistic by nature, it is absolutely clear that he regards it as a language. His understanding of this dream language as contained within the consciousness is demonstrated by his response to the work by the German philosopher Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert - Die Symbolik des Traumes.[15] While von Schubert also theorised a language of dreams (a picture language or "Traumbildsprache"), he suggested that it is a language available to the soul only when it is freed from the body, in either dream or death. Coleridge's disagreement with this depends in part on his view that the soul cannot be free of the body during sleep – that all facets of selfhood remain intact and whole during the process of dreaming – that "the passiveness of the Soul to the Body is the principal character of Sleep" (62). Hence while von Schubert

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15 As related by Ford (62)

suggested a language purely spiritual in nature, Coleridge's conception of dream language is that it is fully bound to the dreamer, to the unconscious subject, to the point that it can express physical, bodily sensations being undergone by the dreamer. It is, however, not accessible to the waking subject – even in recollection, it cannot be translated in its entirety, and Coleridge returned to some of his dream records to find them incomprehensible even to himself. Ford suggests that this is in fact a further attempt at repression and that "Coleridge's language struggles to reconcile the desire to record accurately what has been experienced with the desire to evade the significance of what has been dreamt" (67), but it is also clear that in attempting to accurately record the experience of the dream, Coleridge tends to obscure subject and object by lack of grammatical structure. The events, narrative and meaning of the dream are unclear precisely because the language in which they are recorded is an attempt to represent the experience of dream language.[16]

While Coleridge rejects von Schubert's idea that the language of dreams is the language of the free flying soul, then, it is clear that he regards it as the language of the repressed unconscious. Further, it is an authentic language that is consubstantial with that which it represents: this is shown most clearly in his belief (discussed above) that some dreams were not merely about Sara, but that 'whole dreams' were her. For signifier and signified to be identical in this way is a quality of natural, or Adamic, language - the "subordinate *Logos*, that was in the

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[16] The Notebook entries themselves are written in a way that seems to avoid structure, and frequently move between different languages and different subjects – these elements are attempts to represent authentically the thought processes of the author.

beginning, and was the thing it represented." Coleridge's philosophical and theological understanding of the self is bound up with his theories of how the self is expressed – that even as the unconscious self is known only to God, so the language of the unconscious springs from the language of the divine – a language inherited and yet inaccessible.

It is evident, then, from Coleridge's criticism and philosophy that he understood the self as divided in two ways: Cartesian rationalism results in a clear split between the subjective and the objective that is at the heart of Romantic thought and poetry, but Coleridge further concerned himself with the inaccessible subjective - the unconscious. While the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads is one of the most overt statements of the desire in Romantic thought to express the subjective, the disagreement that ensued between Wordsworth and Coleridge describes the differences in their approaches to this desire. It is clear that Coleridge's preoccupation is entirely with the most hidden self, and with finding the linguistic or symbolic means of expressing the most nebulous and subjective of experiences. His studies of language and self, then, are not parallel trains of thought - they are the same: Coleridge sees the development of self, and the development of language, as identical. His belief that the unconscious has its own language follows logically from this understanding, and is allied entirely with his belief in the importance of metaphysics. As the essence of man must be known only to God, so the language of this essence is the language that came from God - the pre-lapsarian language of Adam. His Notebook comment

regarding symbolic language can thus refer to the idea that this non-arbitrary

language exists deep within consciousness:

> In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon
>
> dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking,
>
> as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me that
>
> already and forever exists, than obscuring anything new. (2546)

It is in his Notebooks that his most unguarded comments on this topic

appear, and it is in his discussion and recording of his dreams that the connection

between levels of consciousness and types of language becomes most focussed.

It is also self-reflexive: the language that Coleridge uses to describe his dreams

becomes increasingly composed of symbol and code, and increasingly subjective.

In Chapter Three I will discuss the connections between dream language and

poetic language, and show how it is in Coleridge's poetry that his lamentation for

this authentic expression is most keenly manifested, but it is clear that his

philosophy, prose and Notebooks already show that he theorised both the

existence of the unconscious, and the existence of a language of the unconscious.

Chapter Two

Lacan, Kristeva and Coleridge: The Self Divided Between Symbolic and Semiotic

In Chapter One, I showed how Coleridge regards the development of language and the development of the self as consubstantial. In this chapter I will demonstrate the way in which this view relates to theories developed in the twentieth century, and in particular to ideas arising from the development of post-structural psychoanalytic theory. While the understanding of consciousness as divided is not the sole province of psychoanalysis, and the designation of the unconscious as the repressed part of the self was certainly considered before Freud, the vocabulary of the discipline, and its structuring of the processes of socialisation, help to illuminate pre-existing theories of consciousness.

I will begin by examining the development of this school of thought, specifically looking at Jacques Lacan's integration of structuralism and psychoanalysis, and his consequential understanding that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan 2006, 37). Lacan's departure from Freud lies most clearly in this conception of the self as structured through language, and is clearly apposite to Coleridge's understanding of the development of the divided self. I will then progress to discuss the way in which Julia Kristeva has used Lacanian theory as the basis from which she develops her own idea of the relationship between modes of language and modes of consciousness. I will show

how Kristeva's designation of language as "Symbolic" and "Semiotic" is consonant with Coleridge's view that the conscious and the unconscious self have different languages. While Coleridgean and Kristevan definitions of the language of the unconscious itself are clearly similar, and while they understand its inception in the same way, their understanding of how this language may be used, and of its accessibility, is radically different. Finally I will examine one recent Kristevan reading of Coleridge to more clearly delineate my own position. My intention is neither to analyse Coleridge's psyche, nor uncover unintended expressions of patriarchal hegemony, through Kristevan theory, but rather to show how Coleridge's poetry expresses his own understanding of Semiotic language as ultimately both desirable and unattainable. By juxtaposing Kristevan theories of Symbolic and Semiotic language, and of poetic expression, with Coleridge's ideas of the language of the unconscious, I will move toward my exposition of Coleridge's poetry as expressive of his grief, not simply for linguistic adequacy, but for the unity represented by it.

The main focus of all psychoanalysis is with the process of individualization and socialization: firstly with the way in which an individual reaches a sense of a self that is separate from the rest of the world - an understanding of a consciousness that exists independently and apart from the world around us - and secondly with the way we perceive this self relationally, in the physical and social structures of the world. Lacan describes this process as moving from the "Imaginary" to the "Symbolic" stage of psychological

development (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 81): the Imaginary is the state in which

an infant originally exists, in which it has no understanding of its own boundaries

or limitations, and does not differentiate between the real and the imagined world.

Via a process he describes as the "Mirror Stage" (first outlined in his 1936 paper

to the International Psychoanalytic Congress[17]) it enters the world of the

"Symbolic," which is the world of structure, primarily represented by the

structure of language. The post-structural nature of Lacan's theory is clear: his

influence is Saussure's idea of linguistic determinism – that we do not simply

describe our experience of the world by language, but rather that our

understanding of the world is formed by language. In other words, our world is

limited and defined by the linguistic structure within which we contain it. In

Chapter One, I showed how Coleridge's description of Hartley's reaction to a

reflection makes clear that he sees language and conception as intertwined. He

says

> I shewed him the whole magnificent Prospect in a Looking Glass, and
>
> held it up, so that the whole was like a Canopy or Ceiling over his head, &
>
> he struggled to express himself concerning the Difference between the
>
> Thing & the Image almost with convulsive Effort - I never before saw
>
> such an abstract of *Thinking* as a pure act & energy, of *Thinking* as
>
> distinguished from *Thoughts*[18]

Coleridge here sees the struggle of expression as the same thing as the struggle

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17 While this paper was never published, a 1949 revised version was published in the Ecrits in
    1966. Both versions are discussed by Benvenuto and Kennedy (54)
18 This is the passage taken from Note # 923, in Notebook 1

for conception – both come into being simultaneously. This observation may not lead Coleridge as far as Saussure's conclusions that it is language that structures perception rather than the other way round, but he certainly regards the formation and acquisition of language as intrinsic to the developing consciousness, to the coming into being of subjectivity.

If, then, our understanding of the world, and of ourselves, can only be represented by that which exists within the structure of language, then what exists outside linguistic structure is separated, and repressed. Simplistically, it is in this way that the unconscious is formed. In other words, while the birth into the Symbolic involves an entry into society - and selfhood - by the acceptance of language, and of the cultural and social structures that constitute the child's world, it also necessitates the leaving behind of the feeling of universality that characterizes the Imaginary. For Lacan, this creates in us a permanent feeling of "desire" – a nebulous awareness of something missing, an unspecified emptiness that can never be filled (2006, 311). The entry into the Symbolic, therefore, results in the repression of this desire, and of a sense of need and fulfillment outside linguistic structures, which ultimately takes refuge in a hidden part of consciousness. As Hans Bertens puts it, "For Lacan, there is a direct connection between the repressive character of language and culture and the coming into being of the unconscious" (162). Therefore that which is repressed - by its inexpressibility in language - becomes the unconscious[19].

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19 Clearly, Lacan's idea of the unconscious as that which is repressed by socialization is derived from Freud's work on the formation of the divided self, as is all psychoanalytic thought. What

The process by which birth into the Symbolic is achieved is termed by Lacan "The Mirror Stage," and while Lacan uses the metaphor of an infant seeing, and not recognizing, his or her reflection in a mirror, the Mirror Stage is more specifically the way in which our perception of ourselves is based on others' perception of us. According to Lacan, we come to understand ourselves as separate identities relationally; by the experience of being perceived by others, and by the "Other" of patriarchal society. This mirror image, ourselves as others see us, comes to constitute our idea of ourselves. However, because of its very relational nature, identity is therefore not fixed, but rather a continual process. It is also never entirely correct – it can only constitute those parts of ourselves that are reflected back to us, so is forever incomplete. This repeated mis-recognition is the same lack of self-knowledge that so concerns Coleridge – his belief that the whole of an individual is known only to God, and cannot be perceived from the inside, as it were, by the subject[20]. In both Coleridge's and Lacan's understanding, the conscious self is fractured into multiple reflected identities defined by the 'other,' and the organic unity of the authentic self is inaccessible from within the social and linguistic structures that comprise human existence and delineate conscious experience. Ultimately then, because the primary structure by which our identity is constructed is that of language, that identity "can be said to be a linguistic construct: we are constructed in language. That

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is important here, however, is that Lacan, as a post-structuralist, sees both the self, and therefore the socialization process, as formed *in language.*

[20] It is also evident in what we now term (somewhat confusingly) Coleridge's 'self-consciousness' – his preoccupation with his audience (the 'other'), and with the version of his identity manifested to that audience within any given piece of work

language, however, is not our own and could never express what we would want to say if we had, for instance, access to our unconsciousness" (Bertens 162). Even as language, then, is constitutive of social structure and inclusion, and of consciousness and selfhood, so it is the means by which we suffer the division of the self, and the experience of alienation.

There is a clear parallel between Coleridge's understanding of the relationship between identity and language, and Lacan's psychoanalytic model of consciousness as structured by language, and each of these models develops further into a more specific theory of conscious and unconscious language. Coleridge, as we have seen, believed that a linguistic system exists (most noticeably within dreams) that expresses the deeper understanding – and the repressed desire - of the unconscious, inner self, and that this language is clearly differentiated from the socially constructed language of the conscious mind. Similarly, Julia Kristeva, using Lacan's theories to examine structures of language more closely, concludes that the result of this process of individualization and socialization is that we have two types of language. The first she terms the 'Symbolic': this is the language of Lacan's Symbolic order, of the structured conscious. The second is the 'Semiotic,' an expression of the repressed self that Lacan termed the Imaginary. For Kristeva, therefore, Symbolic language is that which is defined within patriarchal social structures, and is the language which both allows us access to this order, and separates us from our repressed unconscious, while the Semiotic is a language "preceding

meaning and signification, mobile, amorphous" (Oliver, 44) – the language that

exists before linguistic structure. That it is "mobile" and "amorphous" suggests a

similarity to Coleridge's dream language, which cannot be reproduced even in his

Notebooks: the Semiotic cannot be pinned down to a specific signification once it

has surfaced into the conscious sphere because the conscious can only structure

signification in the binary of signifier/signified. Oliver designates "signification"

here the process made possible only by the disruption that occurs in the birth of

the subject into the Symbolic, whence the division of signifier and signified

emerges . The Semiotic "precedes... signification" because it precedes the

division of the self into subject and object, meaning and expression. It thus

expresses the absolute unity of self, and of expression that precedes Lacan's

Mirror Stage.

While the Lacanian Symbolic Order – and therefore Kristeva's Symbolic

language – is overtly designated as masculine, as patriarchal, Kristeva moves one

step further and posits the pre-linguistic stage, and Semiotic language, as

feminine, and as related to the maternal. As the Imaginary stage, the feeling of

universality, is related to a lack of separation from the mother, so pre-symbolic

language is necessarily figured as associated with the mother, and this association

of the maternal with the Imaginary stage extends into the pre-natal physical unity

of mother and child. It is at what Kristeva terms the thetic stage, the first

separation and understanding of subjectivity, that Symbolic language, which

posits discourse between subject and object, comes into being. While Coleridge

sees the languages of the conscious and unconscious as isolated, however,

Kristeva states that neither of these two types of language ever exists entirely

independently of each other, saying that

> Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying
>
> system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively'
>
> symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.
>
> (1984, 24)

Thus the Semiotic surfaces into the Symbolic as the language of the repressed,

and while the level of 'civilization' of the subject (as influenced by the stage of

their linguistic development, or their mental health) affects the ratio of the

Semiotic within expression, it is always present. Kristeva, like Coleridge,

therefore sees the self as divided, with each part having its own language, but

believes that within all discourse, the conscious and the unconscious vie for

expression.

In what way, then, do Coleridge and Kristeva diverge in their conception

of the language of the unconscious? For Coleridge, as we have seen, unconscious

language derives not only from a repressed part of the self, but from our pre-

lapsarian ancestry. So long as this unconscious language is associated with God,

it must remain inaccessible, and access to it is associated with salvation, and with

a state of Grace. This is most clearly shown in Coleridge's poetry, as I will

discuss in Chapter Three. For Kristeva, however, the divided self does not

remain so neatly divided. As the quotation above shows, she purports, somewhat

contrary to Lacan's suggestion, that the repressed self is never fully repressed.

Further, she theorizes a kind of intertextuality between the two modes – as one

precedes the other, so it continually influences and erupts into the other:

> It may be hypothesized that certain semiotic articulations are transmitted
>
> through the biological code or physiological 'memory' and thus form the
>
> inborn bases of the symbolical functions... As will become apparent...
>
> however, the *symbolic* - and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories -
>
> is a social effect of the relation to the other established through the
>
> objective constraints of biological... differences and concrete,
>
> historical family structures. Genetic programmings are necessarily
>
> semiotic: they include the primary processes such as displacement and
>
> condensation. (1984, 29)

"Displacement" and "Condensation" are two of the mental processes, as defined

by Freud, whereby repressed desire is figured in dreams. Condensation literally

compresses different ideas, or people, into a single representation. Displacement

is the way in which an anxiety, person or desire becomes transferred onto the

image of another, which the dreamer's unconscious associates with it. Hence

desire may be represented while remaining hidden from the conscious mind. In a

literary sense these processes are synonymous with metonymy and metaphor. It

is clear from this passage, then, that for Kristeva the development of the

Symbolic does not simply follow, but is dependent on the Semiotic – the

Semiotic is a prerequisite for the development of the Symbolic. As she aligns the

feminine principle, and the maternal, with the Semiotic (hence the necessity of the Semiotic in order to achieve the birth of Symbolic language), so it is the language of creativity, of making, and coming into being. The origin of the semiotic – the "chora" is the "sounds and rhythms that set up the possibility of signification before the infant (mis)recognizes itself in the mirror stage" (Oliver, 24) – these are the sounds and rhythms of the maternal, and even the prenatal.

Where Coleridge and Kristeva fundamentally agree is on the nature of this language as derived from the unconscious. Kristeva states this directly when she says that "our positing of the semiotic is obviously inseparable from a theory of the subject that takes into account the Freudian positing of the unconscious" (1984, 30), while Coleridge says that "Man... is not meant to be able to communicate *all* the greater part of his being must [be] solitary - even of his consciousness" (Beer, 43). That the unconscious has a language distinct from that of the conscious, then, is the point of confluence between these two theorists, while their differences remain in the possibility for the use of the language in conscious, waking life. As discussed earlier, Coleridge finds it most obviously within dreams, and Jennifer Ford suggests that this is because

> dreams invoke a split between the self as an object and the self as a
> subject. In dreams, conscience becomes the '*real*' antithesis of the 'I',
> and the dream and its characters oppose this conscience. The split
> between the 'I' who dreams and the 'I' in the dream is further occasioned
> by the motives and passions of the dreamer (37)

Hence the Coleridgean model of dream language is a dialogic one – the dream

invokes interaction between the different parts of the self (the "I"'s or levels of

consciousness taking the subject/object roles during the process of dreaming) and

the language of the submerged self becomes apparent (if not comprehensible) to

the 'conscience' that opposes it. For Coleridge here, the language of the dream is

the language of desire, and the dream plays out the very process of repression

even as it expresses that desire: as discussed in Chapter One, his dreams about

Sara Hutchison (and the anxieties raised by them) in particular exemplify this

discourse between conscience and desire. Kristeva also sees dream imagery as an

example of Semiotic language: discussing those psychological and physiological

processes that precede language acquisition and the birth into the Symbolic

Order, she points out that

> Theory can 'situate' such processes and relations diachronically within the
>
> process of the constitution of the subject precisely because *they function*
>
> *synchronically within the signifying process of the subject himself*, i.e. the
>
> subject of *cogitatio*. Only in *dream* logic, however, have they attracted
>
> attention. (1984, 29)

The dream reveals the nature of Semiotic language through its lack of structure,

of grammar and syntax. The language of dreams – of the unconscious –

necessarily exists outside structure, arising as it does from the chora which "is

inaccessible to the mind and outside time" (Smith 60). As the chora "precedes...

spatiality and temporality" (Kristeva 1984, 26), so the Semiotic language it

produces is simultaneous with that which it signifies. As it precedes the division

of the universal Imaginary into signifier and signified, it is thus also synonymous

with that which it signifies.

It is the character of unconscious language as separate to conscious

language – as necessarily existing outside structure - that renders it inaccessible,

and this is why Coleridge places unconscious language within the realm of the

divine; it is the language of the ineffable, and his preoccupation with it dwells

largely on both its desirability and its impossibility. Because Kristeva regards

expression as always divided, however, she does not discount the use of the

Semiotic within literary texts. Indeed, she sees it as one of the characteristic

modes - of poetry in particular. As verbal expression comprises the deliberate

Symbolic with unconscious Semiotic int-eruption, so the Kristevan model of text

comprises a surface, structured part she terms the "phenotext" and an implicit,

unstructured "genotext." This is possible because Kristeva sees in the text, as in a

dream, a process as well as an artefact. She describes it thus:

> Even though it can be seen in language, the genotext is not linguistic (in
>
> the sense understood by structural or generative linguistics). It is, rather, a
>
> *process*, which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral (unstable,
>
> threatened by drive charges, 'quanta' rather than 'marks') and non-
>
> signifying (devices that do not have a double articulation). (Moi, 121)

The genotext – the semiotic aspect of text – is defined as "musical, anterior,

enigmatic, mysterious and rhythmic" (Smith, 21). By this definition, the text

which contains the highest incidence of Semiotic language is poetry: we have already seen how the Semiotic may be observed within such literary tropes as metaphor and metonymy, and the association of the genotext with qualities such as music and rhythm further strengthens its place within the poetic. Kristeva suggests that these qualities underlie the Semiotic's relation to the quality of textual mystery, the effect created by something other than the strictly linguistic (Symbolic) structures. Kristeva's revolution (of La Révolution du Langage Poétique) is the function of the poetic to move from straightforward "signification" to semiotic "sens." This is because poetic language works precisely by undermining the structures that usually characterise textual expression - as Anne-Marie Smith puts it, poetic language "is defined by its infringement of the laws of grammar and prose" (21). The function of poetry is to create, to "make it new,"[21] and this creativity must come from drives outside the prosaic, the structured, the Symbolic.

While Coleridge, in his poetry, laments the inaccessibility of the Semiotic, the language of the unconscious, he shares this idea of poetry as rule breaking, as structurally subversive. To reiterate his 1802 letter to Sotheby, he says

> In my opinion every phrase, every metaphor, every personification, should
>
> have its justifying cause in some *passion* either of the poet's mind, or of
>
> the Characters described by the poet - But *metre itself* implies a *passion*,
>
> i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of

---

21 Ezra Pound's exhortation is in the context of imagism, but surely belongs equally to the aims
of poets before and since.

the Reader ... In my opinion, Poetry justifies, as *Poetry* independent of

any other Passion, some new combinations of Language, & *commands* the

omission of many others allowable in other compositions. (1984, 10)[22]

That he associates "meter itself" so intrinsically with "passion" shows that

Coleridge, like Kristeva, links the most specifically poetic of tropes with the

expression of instinctive and unregulated human emotion. There is a difference

between the two views, however: Kristeva's view of some tropes as existing

outside the structured and the conscious, as so particularly breaking the rules of

grammar and prose, is specifically derived from her readings of early modernist

poetry – to apply it quite so generally to all poetry would be disingenuous.

Kristeva regards the modernist movement as a <u>Revolution in Poetic Language</u>, as

"the end of poetry as delirium, which is contemporaneous with its inseperable

counterpart – literature as an attempted submission to the logical order" (1984,

82). In her criticism of earlier poetry, she specifically refers to the Romantic

period: she says that

> ... starting with the Renaissance and the brief Romantic celebration of the
>
> sacrifices made in the French Revolution, poetry had become mere
>
> rhetoric, linguistic formalism, a fetishization, a surrogate for the thetic.
>
> (83)

So while Romantic poets, and most specifically Coleridge and Wordsworth,

regarded their poetry as aesthetic experimentation, as 'making it new,' and

certainly as an overthrowing of the old ways of writing poetry, Kristeva's view is

---

22 As quoted by Engell and Bate in their introduction.

that their poetry, their language, continued to reflect society and the self

constructed within the Symbolic. McGann's discussion of Romantic ideology

clarifies this further – he says that all poetry

> 'reflects' – and reflects upon – those individual and social forms of human
>
> life which are available to the artist's observation, and which are
>
> themselves a part of his process of observation. In the Romantic period
>
> this double act of reflection – the representation and the self-conscious
>
> return – tends to situate the field of Romantic poetry at the ideological
>
> level in a specific way. One of the basic illusions of Romantic Ideology is
>
> that only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation by
>
> 'the world' of politics and money. (13)

Kristeva's expression of this is straightforward: she states that the "established

bourgeois regime had been consuming this kind of poetry since the Restoration...,

reducing it to a decorative uselessness that challenged none of the subjects of its

time" (83). Thus even as Romantic ideology sought to 'transcend' the material

world through new types of poetry and new methods of social organisation,[23] it

worked within existing linguistic and social frameworks - from conscious,

structured language.

Coleridge certainly saw himself as working within frameworks, within

structured rules, and these included conventions of rhyme scheme and metrical

systems. In other words, for Coleridge as for Kristeva, the poetic tropes of

---

23 I am thinking most obviously here of the failed experiment with pantisocracy, as well as more
generally of the many Romantic expositions on Atheism, Unitarianism and social change.

Romanticism are not instances of the Semiotic bursting forth from within the structure of the poem, but rather tools whose careful and deliberate use may render the Symbolic less familiar, more authentic. They may take him closer to the Semiotic, but they do not render it entire on the page. And this illustrates another difference in view – Coleridge theorises two very different types of language that are separate and distinct: the Semiotic would only be attainable if one could turn a dream into a poem without changing its structure or the quality or mode of its expression[24]. For Kristeva, neither of these systems can exist independently – the Symbolic relies on the presence of the Semiotic within its structure in order to exist, so that unity and alienation are always in combination. Poetry ultimately has the power to dismantle its own structure from within, to free the Semiotic expression that already inheres, but within Coleridge's poetry, the Symbolic is firmly in control and the structure remains intact.

Here then, is the crux of this juxtaposition – Coleridge and Kristeva basically theorise the existence of the same thing – a language of the unconscious, and thus of authentic, universal expression. Kristeva sees the evidence of this language everywhere, in all expression, but most notably in the expression of small children, of the insane, and of poets. And for her, it is the poet who has the potential to liberate the Semiotic, to achieve authentic expression. Coleridge sees this language as the connection to God, and as the perfect poetic expression, but it

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24 The introduction to "Kubla Khan" suggests that Coleridge believes this possible. The language and narrative of the poem, however, suggest that it is in fact a lamentation the very impossibility of dream language in poetry, thus rendering the introduction a poetic trope in itself. I will discuss this further in Chapter Three.

remains entirely inaccessible to him in his waking life. His poetry, far from being an expression of Semiotic language, and of its power, is an expression of mourning for a language lost forever in the process of socialization.

To close this chapter, I will briefly turn to an example of a Kristevan reading of Coleridge, as a means of clarifying my own discussions in the following chapter. Anne Williams' "An I for an Eye: 'Spectral Persecution in 'The Rime of The Ancient Mariner'" uses Kristeva's theories to suggest the Mariner's rejection of the feminine, and thus to show Coleridge's "privileging of the symbolic" (257). It is a specifically feminist reading that suggests that the repression of the Semiotic in the overt narrative and implicit symbolism is symptomatic of a repression of the female principle, and of the importance of the maternal. Williams says that

> Entry into the symbolic is a creative act, for the self is thereby constituted. Though Coleridge was a Romantic in taking this process as his subject, he dis-covers an ideology not merely Romantic,... but also patriarchal in its horrified repression of the female. (256)

Williams acknowledges the discourse between the text itself and its accompanying gloss as a clear example of the relation between the Symbolic and the Semiotic: the didactic gloss acts as an agent of the Symbolic as it imposes structure and meaning on the poetic text. Even this, though, seems to contradict her positing of the privileging of the Symbolic – the gloss surely fails, ultimately, to contain the strangeness of the poem itself. Further, she regards the disunity of

the poem as a failure of the (Coleridgean) Imagination -

> Even McGann... presupposes a Coleridgean ideology: the "meanings"
>
> have one "meaning"... Yet the "Rime" seems extravagantly *dis*unified,
>
> composed of interruptions, disruptions and irruptions. (238)

Williams' understanding of the Mariner's journey as a metaphor for his birth into

subjectivity and the symbolic order seems apt, yet she characterises his desire for

unity (and the horror of the interruptions) as a move away from the Semiotic,

rather than (as Kristeva or Lacan would characterise it) a yearning to return to it.

Indeed, Williams describes the Mariner's "leap into the symbolic" (257) as a

reaction against "the horrifying vacancy inherent in separation from the maternal

and material" (257). As described above, Kristeva views the separation from the

maternal as caused by the birth into the symbolic, not just as followed by it. As

noted above, Williams' reading is specifically feminist, and Kristevan theory has

been appropriated as feminist, although Kristeva herself eschews the designation.

While Williams' essay is insightful and detailed in its illumination of the

Kristevan elements in this poem, her emphasis on gender binaries, and her

association of the Semiotic with 'woman/female,' and not just with 'maternal,' as

Kristeva herself aligns it, mistakes the poem's pain of alienation for horror of the

feminine. She concludes of Coleridge that the Rime "was as close as he could

come to imagining the unspeakable" (258), and it is this statement which most

clearly misrepresents the poem – as I will show, Coleridge's imagining of the

unspeakable is present throughout his work, because it is concerned precisely

with unspeakability.

The idea of the unconscious, and of repressed drives and desires, is not confined to psychoanalysis. It runs through all literary expression as a part of the condition of being human, and thus as a subject for contemplation or for narrative. Psychoanalysis, though, has provided us with a vocabulary with which to both express, and to analyse, the discourse between conscious and unconscious, and the products of this discourse. Hence we can see Lacan's overt delineation of how we are constructed and confined in and by language. While structuralist influences on anthropology, philosophy and criticism show us how we are, and how our understanding of the world works, post-structuralist psychoanalysis shows us how we came to be, how we are constructed to ourselves, as well as to each other. Lacan's supposition that we are constructed in language, then, that the psyche itself functions as a language, allows for the examination of the self and of language to work simultaneously. Kristeva's elaboration of this, her close examination of exactly how language functions in both its socialised and repressed forms, leads us back to literature, to discover the traces of the unconscious within conscious expression. And returning to Coleridge shows us that his understanding of this unconscious expression, of its character and its origin, parallels Kristeva's. This chapter, though, has elaborated the crucial difference between Kristeva's and Coleridge's understanding of our ability to use this language. Kristeva not only sees it as present within our every expression, she sees it as involuntary and entirely ineluctable. Coleridge views it

only as the language of dreams, the language lost to conscious expression with the Fall from Grace, only attainable on return to Grace. That is why his belief in it is expressed most frequently in his poetry, and specifically in his supernatural poetry – it belongs to that world of the 'more than natural,' the metaphysical. In my readings of this poetry, I will show how each poem expresses not only Coleridge's understanding of Semiotic language, but his desire for it, and his grief for its loss.

Chapter Three

Coleridge's Poetry: Fragments Dim of Lovely Forms

Coleridge believed in a language that exceeded all others in its purity and its

accuracy – a language of the unconscious. He believed, however, that that

language was inaccessible: it resides in the part of man known only to God and

cannot be used in a material world. As Modiano summarises it: "Coleridge

believed in the existence of a prelinguistic level of consciousness which cannot be

fitted into any one objectified verbal structure. The poet's innermost feelings and

impressions are... 'languageless'" (60). This belief lies at the heart of his two most

accomplished poems - "Kubla Khan" and The Rime of The Ancient Mariner,

which express Coleridge's understanding of a language beyond structure, and his

unhappiness at its inaccessibility. Two poems written at the same time, however

- "Christabel" and "The Pains of Sleep" - concern themselves with the anxiety

that accompanies this belief - his wariness of exploring his unconscious, and the

darker part of himself kept beneath the surface. In this chapter, I will explore just

how the poems express these themes; further to that, by looking at them through

the lens of Kristevan theory, I will show that Coleridge came closer to the

language of the unconscious in these poems than he was ever able to

acknowledge.

While the date of composition of "Kubla Khan" is – due partly to

Coleridge's own contradictory accounts - not precisely clear, what is sure is that

the Preface to the poem was added more than fifteen years later. The Preface has, however, profoundly influenced readings of the poem, and it is intrinsic to my explication of it. Interpretations of the Preface have suggested that it evades responsibility for elements of the poem: that by putting the blame on the unconscious mind of the 'dream,' the poet may deny that its 'incompleteness' is a flaw. Critics such as E. Schneider and A. C. Purves (Adair, 109) suggest that, as the poem is clearly constructed by a conscious mind, Coleridge is dissembling in order to "make 'Kubla Khan' more remarkable than it really was in order to reassure himself psychologically of his own genius" (109). Much of this criticism is based on the contrast of the Preface with the earlier manuscript in which he describes the poem's inspiration as arriving in a 'reverie,' and derives from the fact that a dream is an unconscious state whereas a reverie is a conscious, if undirected, state. While later writers have acknowledged that Coleridge probably did not intend for the Preface to be taken at face value, the interest of the former critics in the poet's state of consciousness while receiving inspiration is key: it is my contention that the Preface is intended precisely as a means of drawing attention to states of consciousness and their relation to poetic composition. As for the poem's incompleteness, Humphry House asks, "If Coleridge had never published his Preface, who would have thought of "Kubla Khan" as a fragment?" (200), and the poem does indeed appear complete – rhythmically, thematically and narratively - if we ignore Coleridge's hint to the contrary. Hence the idea of "Kubla Khan" as a fragment, and the importance of

states of consciousness to its theme and meaning, are brought to the fore exactly

by the Preface. Further, as Levinson puts it, the Preface "explicitly invites

psychological interpretation. One is asked to construe the text as material

smuggled out from the unconscious" (102). I would suggest, however, that the

idea of the poem as an accurate transcription of a dream is intended to be ironic,

as the poem's theme is the impossibility of conscious language to express what is

experienced in an unconscious state. The first part of the poem illustrates

Coleridge's belief in the inadequacy of conscious language to express the vision

in a dream, while the second part overtly discusses the poet's desire for access to

perfect, non-arbitrary language.

The Preface describes Coleridge's reading of "Purchas His Pilgrimage"

before falling asleep, and goes on:

> The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of
>
> the external senses, during which time he had the most vivid confidence,
>
> that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred
>
> lines: if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose
>
> up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent
>
> expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. (296)

Herein lies the source of the criticism mentioned above: Coleridge describes the

"*things*," the images that he experienced, in a way that seems to be an accurate

representation of a dream state. He then purports that the images were

accompanied by their "correspondent expressions." Such expression would surely

align with his theories on dream language, and Adamic language – his dream is a

vision in the language of perfect representation. Schneider's accusation of

dissembling arises from the fact that the poem is not written in this language –

that it is a composition in the arbitrary language of conscious symbolic

expression. But this is Coleridge's point - his tale of the dream's interrupted

transcription is a metaphor for the briefer process of trying to recollect a dream on

waking, of trying to translate it into a form that is coherent. The "person from

Porlock" who interrupts this process of recollection is thus a trope for the

intervention of the conscious mind onto the unconscious, the cause of the dream's

slipping away into a series of images and impressions that cannot be represented

in conscious language.

This is supported by Coleridge's quotation in the Preface from his own,

later, poem, "The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution." The passage describes a

youth's perception of the image of his beloved in the surface of a pool, its

disruption and loss, and how as the pool's calm is restored, "the fragments dim of

lovely forms / Come trembling back, unite, and now once more / The pool

becomes a mirror" (L98 – 100). The relevance of this quotation lies in the fact

that the initial image resolves itself into a reflection in which the beloved is no

longer represented, thus suggesting that his vision is an imaginative one, rather

than a true reflection[25]. The status of the image as a product of the viewer's

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25 Some critics read the lines regarding the beloved's appearance literally (e.g. Levinson, 98). I
read the later lines "Till sickly thoughts bewitch thine eyes, and thou Behold'st her shadows
still abiding there" (108-9) as an indication that the youth is already conjuring the image of his
beloved purely by his "mad Love-yearning" (107).

unconscious is echoed in the nature of the image as, literally, fluid and insubstantial. This extract speaks directly to the underlying meaning of "Kubla Khan" - that the experience, or indeed creation, of the unconscious cannot be pinned down in conscious, symbolic language. In particular, it highlights the passage at the end of the first section,

> The shadow of the dome of pleasure
>
> Floated midway on the waves;
>
> Where was heard the mingled measure
>
> From the fountain and the caves (L30 – 34).

This passage follows the section describing the creation of the "pleasure-dome," and its surroundings. It is foregrounded on the page by virtue of its placing – as a separate, indented, stanza - but also by its sudden calm after the drama and violence of the preceding passage. It serves to illustrate that the very description it follows cannot capture the truth of the vision – the "shadow" that floats insubstantially just out of reach - "midway on the waves." The vision is the "midway" between conscious and unconscious, as is substantiated by the imagery of the preceding stanzas.

The opening of the poem uses images of origin, and of creation. The river is named "Alph" (L3), clearly aligning it with the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and with Biblical origin[26]. The use of the word "decree" (L2) rather than Purchas's more mundane "build," suggests that the word itself – the all

---

26 For example Jesus's words in Revelations 22:13 read "I am the Alpha the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End"

encompassing <u>desire</u> - is enough to effect the dome's construction[27]. Thus the

dome, like the poem, is created in language, and its construction becomes

metaphoric of imaginative creation. This first stanza is reminiscent of Milton's

Eden[28] in its imagery – despite suggesting origin in the "forests ancient as the

hills" (L10), it is a controlled and quantifiable space, where "twice five miles of

fertile ground / with walls and towers were girdled round" (L6-7). This stanza,

then, is an image of origin and primacy – of the Lacanian "Imaginary" as the first

means of creation. Its progression toward images of repression, however, as

creation is harnessed into civilised forms and shapes, suggests the movement into

the Symbolic – the walls and measurements contain and restrict the landscape,

just as Symbolic language structures and contains the conception that precedes it.

    If the imagery of this stanza is primal, then so is its rhythmic structure: its

meter is iambic, and in this context of creation and origin, the rhythm becomes

reminiscent of a pulse, or a heartbeat. This association is strengthened as the

poem progresses into the second stanza, particularly with the suggestion that it is

"as if this earth in thick fast pants were breathing" (L17)– hence it is a bodily

sound that is even located prenatally (as the Mother's heartbeat dominates all

sound in the womb) and certainly prelinguistically. The straightforward rhyme

scheme suggests immediacy of expression and instinctive articulation, locating

rhyming couplets within staggered rhyme that naturally drives the poem forward.

As the images become more intricate, so tetrameter moves into more complex

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27 As well as suggesting psychological origin, this is also reminiscent of John 1:1 which reads
    "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
28 As described in <u>Paradise Lost,</u> Book IV, L220-287

pentameter, so that the structure mirrors this intricacy: the descriptions move

from general, broad overviews – those of a description at a distance -- into

specific, pointed images, highlighted with "there" and "here," as the creation, and

the imagery, becomes more focussed on detail. Hence the straightforward

> So twice five miles of fertile ground

> With walls and towers were girdled round (L6-7)

seems to reflect a broader view that encompasses all of the poem's creation, but

moves into the more close up view in the next lines -

> And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,

> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

> And here were forests ancient as the hills,

> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. (L8-11)

The increase in the number of metrical feet suggests intricacy, and reflects the

greater detail being depicted, as the imagery becomes progressively less that of

omniscient, universal creation, and moves in to suggest the more civilised

elements of husbandry.

George G. Watson finds the combination of the "heavy iambic beat of

traditional English verse" (222) with the lack of traditional stanzaic or ode

structure to be "impossible to explain": he goes further in describing it as

"arrantly modern" (222). I would suggest that it is a combination intended to be

felt rather than understood schematically: Coleridge is using a metre and rhyme

scheme that both reflect, and appeal to, a prelinguistic state of expression by

combining iambic tetrameter and pentameter with much more straightforward, clear language than his other poetry of the same period.

In contrast to the imagery of progressive restriction in the first stanza, the landscape of the second stanza - "A savage place!"(L14) – is characterised by uncontrolled force and sexual imagery. The "sacred river" here becomes "forced" into a "mighty fountain" (L18-19), violently throwing up pieces of the earth itself: the "ceaseless turmoil" that produces this eruption appears "as if this earth in thick fast pants were breathing," and hence the image suggests both sexual and destructive urges bursting through the controlled construction of the earlier image. The pentameter of this section becomes more complex as the iambic rhythm is disrupted, and hence suggests a less controllable form. So while both stanzas depict primal sources of consciousness and creativity, the first suggests the process of the Imaginary as it is civilised and repressed by "walls and towers" (L7) in order to move into the Symbolic, and the second depicts the eruption of the primal unconscious into this controlled landscape. Thus the two stanzas show the conflict between the attempt to civilise consciousness and the failure to fully repress the unruly unconscious that lies beneath. This is the "tumult"(L28) that becomes "Ancestral voices prophesying war"(L30): it thus presages the conflict that is inherent in the construction of the dome – the conflict between the imagery of the unconscious, and the restrictive expression of the conscious.

That these stanzas depict forms of consciousness is clear, and returns us to

the image of the dome as a reflection on the waves – fluid and impossible to fix. The privileging of this short stanza spatially and rhythmically (the metre is compressed forcefully back into tetrametric rhyming couplets) supports its thematic position as a summary of the preceding passage. The poet conceives his description - this poem - as an inadequate reflection of his vision: the image is "midway" between conception and expression, and is impossible to fix as the water of language shifts beneath it. This image is further supported by another metaphor Coleridge employs in his Preface, when he says of his dream-poem that "all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast" (296). As Patricia Adair points out, water imagery recurs in his Notebooks. A note in Book 1 reads:

> 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 & rudders/how this comes to be so difficult/Do not the bad Passions
>
> in Dreams throw light & shew proof upon this hypothesis? (118)

Adair purports that this linking of 'streaminess' with reverie and powers of association "strengthens the suggestion that the river flowing through Kubla's garden is consciousness," (118) while Baker – on the same Note - goes so far as to state of Coleridge that "a hundred years before William James and James Joyce he was aware of the stream of consciousness" (153). This association with modernism returns us to Kristeva's discussion of modernist poetry as the site of the literary Semiotic, and her dismissal of Romanticism. In "Kubla Khan,"

Coleridge is certainly attempting to depict a conflict between states of consciousness that Kristeva would recognise as the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and his depiction of poetic composition centres on his perceived inability to access the language of the unconscious (what Kristeva would call Semiotic expression). It is Kristeva's definition of Semiotic expression, however, that will allow us to examine whether Coleridge is right – whether his yearning for the language of the unconscious is, indeed, as futile as he imagines.

The physical imagery of the poem certainly seems to support a reading of the Semiotic in the poem – as we saw in Chapter Two, if Kristeva associates the Symbolic with processes of socialisation, the Semiotic inheres within the existing "genetic programming" (1984, 29) that allows that process to take place. In full, she says that

> the *symbolic* - and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories – is a
> social effect of the relation to the other established through the objective
> constraints of biological... differences and concrete, historical family
> structures. Genetic programmings are necessarily semiotic: they include
> the primary processes such as displacement and condensation. (1984, 29)

Coleridge uses the construction of the dome as a metaphor for poetic construction, and while metaphor is associated with displacement, here this trope is a conscious choice that is created in the Symbolic. The image of the earth "breathing" (L18), and of the "mighty fountain" (L19), however, is a condensation that is much more specifically Semiotic – it metonymically aligns

the poet with the earth itself, in a passage that conflates poetic creativity with the

sexual act (and thus with biological creativity and maternity), and with the

creation of the earth itself, shaped by the conflict between water and stone. The

passage describing the creation of the fountain suggests it is formed by a process

of pressure, and of destruction:

> Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
>
> Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
>
> Or chaffy grains beneath the thresher's flail (L20-22)

The thresher is the God who creates the earth itself, and the poet creating

language: yet this is an image of creation born of disruption, of violence and of

fragmentation. Indeed, it suggests the chora – the site of continual disruption and

fragmentation from which the Semiotic bursts forth. Even the fountain itelf is

"half-intermitted" (L20), as its eruption is both a disrupted and a disruptive one.

It seems an image that does indeed burst fully formed from the poet's

unconscious, and retains its Semiotic significance on the page.

To return to the rest of "Kubla Khan," we have seen that the first section

of the poem shows the conflict residing within consciousness, and depicts, with

its imagery of reflection, Coleridge's understanding of the impossibility of

representing visions of the unconscious in words. The second section of the

poem overtly reiterates this – but instead of showing us, it tells us. This section is

also presented in two parts, and the first describes another vision:

> A damsel with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw:

It was an Abyssinian maid

And on her dulcimer she play'd (L37-40)

Here Coleridge presents a memory – a form of representation that could be said to reside on the border between conscious and unconscious knowledge. Her language is music, described by Kristeva as a "nonverbal signifying system... constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic" (Moi, 34) and she sings of "Mount Abora," - surely an allusion to Milton's "Mount Amara," which was "by some supposed True Paradise" (L281-2)[29]. So for the poet, the vision he would wish to represent in language is a memory of a vision of music expressing Paradise. The layers of difficulty here – of linguistic inaccessibility – are clear, and are acknowledged in the poet's supposition that if he could only "revive" (L42) that song, he would then be able to recreate - "build" (L46) Kubla's pleasure-dome "in air." In effect, he would have access to perfect non-arbitrary language, to the point that "all who heard would see [it] there" (L48). This section, then, points out quite clearly the poet's desire for a language that is what it describes, that literally recreates in the air what it represents; the perfection of this static airy representation contrasts sharply with the former image of the fluid, wavering reflection formed at the confluence of unconscious creation and conscious language. His belief in the impossibility of such a perfect poetic creation is underlined by the image of the poet who could achieve it – to do so he would have had to drink "the milk of Paradise," and inspire "holy dread"

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precisely because access to such language would imply access to the divine.

Humphry House suggests of the poet that "it is because he can create (the vision) that he deserves the ritual dread" (207), but it is plain from the 'would' and 'should' of the passage that this perfect poet is hypothetical – he is an ideal to which Coleridge aspires. Adair reads this section as looking forwards – this is a future poem that Coleridge believes he will create, claiming that "All who will hear his music or see the visions of his future poem, who are susceptible to his rhythm and imagery, will recognise his poetic power," but this simply does not align with the rest of the poem. The nature of this description of the perfect poet as close to the Divine in fact makes clear Coleridge's understanding of his impossibility. While "Kubla Khan" is indeed a poem about poetry, it is also a deeply personal lament for poetry as an art that he believes impossible to perfect. The language of this ideal poet is inaccessible precisely because it is perfect, and the preceding section of the poem is intended to illustrate the imperfection of language, however evocative and beautiful[30].

If the imagery of the river in "Kubla Khan" can be taken to be metaphoric of consciousness, then the ocean imagery of The Rime of The Ancient Mariner surely also represents a journey of consciousness. In Chapter Two, I suggested that Anne Williams' Kristevan critique of the poem is a feminist mis-reading of

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30 Levinson believes that the poem fails to achieve its "aesthetic ideology" (113), and also detects Coleridge's belief in his inability to write the poetry he wants to write. Reading the poem politically, however, she does not agree that the inadequacies of language are its theme – she says that the poem "criticizes itself mercilessly, condemning its own compositional method even as it thereby unfolds"(114), but believes that this is a failure on Coleridge's part, rather than his intended effect.

the Mariner's reaction to his birth into the Symbolic. Broadly, however, the poem can certainly be read as allegorical of this process – of moving from the unity of the Imaginary into the differentiation of the Symbolic. Camille Paglia says of its imagery that "every man makes a marine voyage out of the cell of archaic ocean that is the sac of womb-waters" (324) and this suggestion of the ship on the ocean as allegorical of the womb is certainly apt. Kristeva associates the Imaginary with both the preverbal and the prenatal, and hence the movement from the Imaginary into the Symbolic begins before language acquisition, at birth. It would be overly schematic[31] to suggest that the shooting of the albatross is a metaphor for birth, but it certainly seems to mark the point of differentiation – of a move from the universal to the subjective. The depiction of the ship's setting before the advent of the albatross places it in a landscape of universality – the snow and ice that surrounds the ship renders the the process of visual differentiation impossible, as everything in view takes on the same aspect:

> 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 (L57-60)

and the ice is accompanied by fog that renders the ship's view of the world even

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31 Interpretations of The Ancient Mariner have historically tended toward the schematisation of symbols within the narrative: Anne Williams rejects Robert Penn Warren's canonical reading of the sun and moon as standing for 'reason' and 'imagination', but then suggests instead a symbolic scheme that genders sun, moon and most elements of the poem (243-4)

more undifferentiated – the albatross perches "In mist or cloud on mast or

shroud" (L73), while at night the moon shines "thro' fog-smoke white."

The idea of the universality of the Imaginary is further suggested by the

Mariner's identification with the rest of the crew. As Williams points out, prior to

the shooting of the Albatross, the Mariner consistently refers to "we" in his

descriptions – he does not differentiate himself from the crew until the line "I shot

the Albatross" (L82). This lack of differentiation is made even clearer by the fact

that the Mariner rarely refers to any of the other members of the crew as

individuals – they are generally described by the all inclusive "we," and uses of

the singular third person pronoun are more usually used in personifications of

natural phenomena, as, for example "The sun came up upon the left!/Out of the

sea came he!" (L25-26) The becalming that takes place shortly after the shooting

of the albatross, then, could certainly be associated with the beginnings of

differentiation, as the shipmates blame the Mariner for their disaster: "What evil

looks/Had I from old and young!" (L139-40) This is shortly followed by

speechlessness, and the end of communication between the men:

> And every tongue, through utter drought,
>
> Was withered at the root;
>
> We could not speak, no more than if
>
> We had been choak'd with soot (L135-138)

Hence the initial separation is followed by an end to communication, distancing

the Mariner further from the crew, depriving him of the Semiotic language of the

Imaginary as he starts to move from unity to repression.

Williams' reading of "Life-In-Death" (L193) shortly afterwards, suggests that the next episode, the nightmare boat, is a rejection of maternity, but Paglia reads this in an almost entirely opposite way. She sees this figure as "ur-mother" - terrible, but symbolic of female power, saying "To give life is to kill. This *is* heaven's mother, who comes when she is called." (325) Paglia equates this maternal figure with a rejection of the "the tender Madonna" (325) called on by the Mariner, and implicitly present in the Christian morality of the framing gloss. For Paglia, then, the issue raised by maternal figures in the <u>Rime</u> is that of moral conflict – here between pagan and Christian models: this conflict is further evident in her phrase "To give life is to kill". The movement from the Imaginary to the Symbolic <u>is</u> a birth, but it also necessitates the death (by repression) of a part of the self. This suggests that the figure of Life-in-Death is a key representation of the movement from Imaginary to Symbolic: in order to live fully within society, to experience the Symbolic, one must experience the death of the universal, and rejection from the Imaginary. Hence Life-in-Death personifies the existential grief of life in the Symbolic, and the weight of the death (of the Imaginary) that must always inhere.

The death of the Mariner's shipmates follows entirely logically from this – it is symptomatic of the Mariner's differentiation as he moves into the subjective:

The many men, so beautiful!

And they all dead did lie:

> And a thousand thousand slimy things
>
> Lived on; and so did I (L240-3)

Yet the Mariner's continued voicelessness is proof that his birth into the Symbolic is not complete. That his voice returns when he blesses the seasnakes (L291-2) has been viewed since Robert Penn Warren's 1946 <u>A Poem in Pure Imagination</u> as a sign of the poem's Christian allegory[32], but psychoanalytically it is the <u>naming</u> of the seasnakes that is more significant: the birth into the Symbolic order is surely indicated by the Mariner's ascription of language to such alien and amorphous creatures. The overwhelming emotion that characterises the poem itself (without, for a moment, considering the gloss) is that of grief. It is true that the poem is full of horrors, for both the Mariner and the Wedding Guest, and that it is apparently concerned with redemption, but the image to which the Mariner consistently returns is that of loss. The killing of the Albatross results ultimately not only in the loss of the bird, but also the loss of the crew, so that the Mariner laments

> Alone, alone, all, all alone,
>
> Alone on a wide wide sea!
>
> And never a saint took pity on
>
> My soul in agony (L232-5).

The Mariner's grief for the loss of the crew – for his shipmates – is for the loss of the "we" by which he defines himself in the early part of the poem. It is for the

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32 Beer, for example, regards it as an indication of Coleridge's dedication to the 'one life' represented also by the Albatross (167-8).

universal, undifferentiated self that has been repressed by his birth into the

Symbolic, and into subjectivity. It is after this section that the crew are

reanimated, so that the Mariner is ultimately abandoned by them repeatedly,

emphasising his differentiation and his alienation.

At the poem's end he declares that:

He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things, both great and small;

For the dear God who loveth us,

He made and loveth all. (L614-7)

This is usually taken as a reference to his killing of the Albatross, and as an

exhortation to treat all creatures with respect, but if it is taken together with the

two stanzas that nearly precede it, it becomes more specific in its character:

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been

Alone on a wide wide sea:

So lonely 'twas, that God himself

Scarce seemed there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast

'Tis sweeter far to me,

To walk together to the kirk

With a goodly company! (L597-604)

The Mariner's grief is not for the Albatross, it is for the undifferentiated

prelinguistic – it is existential loneliness at the separation intrinsic to birth into the symbolic order that drives his urge to repeat – to share - his story constantly.

Thematic readings of the Mariner, as is clear from both Christian and psychoanalytic models, tend to become excessively schematic in the desire to align all the details of the poem symbolically. Ultimately, it is the poem's strangeness that marks it out, and even the 1816 gloss, which I will return to later, is just one example of how schematic readings cannot contain the unruly elements that inhere in the form of the poem as much as in its content. Camille Paglia makes the point that "The problem with moral or Christian readings of The Ancient Mariner is that they can make no sense of the compulsive or delusional frame of the poem" (327). She suggests that Coleridge has backed away from his visionary power – that he is "overcome by anxiety and surrenders to Wordsworth and Christianity" (326). She clearly believes that Coleridge intends the Christian morality of his ending, and that this and the imposition of the gloss are sufficient to contain the unruly nature of the poem. I would suggest that the Mariner, like "Kubla Khan," is a poem about poetry - about the relationship between actuality and expression (what Wolfson terms the "tenor" and the "vehicle"(74)) and that the conflict between content and form is the very means by which Coleridge characterises the difficulty of this relationship.

The form of the Mariner as ballad alludes to traditional poetic form, and specifically orality – it is a tale being told out loud to an audience. Its framing, and the interruptions by the Wedding Guest, further remind us that it should be

read as a dialogue, and that the <u>Rime</u> is a subjective account affected by both

teller and listener. As Raimonda Modiano says,

> The poem does not offer an objective account of an adventurous voyage at
>
> the time when it originally occurred, but merely a later *version* of that
>
> voyage told by an old and lonely man who can neither explain nor fully
>
> describe what happened to him on a "wide wide sea" (41)

It is the Mariner's inability to "fully describe" events that is the concern of this

poem, and that inability returns us to Coleridge's preoccupation with the inability

of conscious language to convey unconscious, or visionary, experience. The

understanding that the Mariner will retell this story continuously initially suggests

that he will tell exactly the same story, but if we examine the interruptions by the

Wedding Guest, we can see how the passages that follow them are influenced by

them. The Wedding Guest does not tend to interrupt the tale at the moments that

are perhaps most disturbing, but rather at the moments which cause him to fear

that the Mariner himself is supernatural, for example after the bodies of the

corpses are reanimated:

> "I fear thee, ancient Mariner!"
>
> Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!
>
> 'Twas not their souls that fled in pain,
>
> Which to their corses came again,
>
> But a troop of spirits blest (L345-9)

Is the Mariner's answer a representation from memory, or merely the answer that

he knows will retain the Wedding Guest's ear? Modiano suggests the latter, and

in doing so purports that it is the influence of the Wedding Guest that increases

the content of Christian morality the Mariner espouses. He says that the Wedding

Guest's intervention shortly before the "spirits blest" enter the text

> identify the Wedding Guest as a source for the Mariner's orthodox
>
> vocabulary. They indicate that the presence of the Wedding Guest forces
>
> the Mariner to mold his unfamiliar past into a more conventional and
>
> communicable story (49)

Similarly, he suggests that the imagery in lines 340- 342 of skylarks and brooks is

chosen by the Mariner to suit his audience. He attempts to clarify and recreate his

story in the subjective language that will be best understood by his audience,

hence he tries to contain the form of his expression to the symbolic register of his

audience.

When viewed in this light, the 1816 gloss also comes into perspective:

rather than an explanation of the narrative, the gloss should surely be read as

juxtaposed to the text. It is (to agree with Williams) a form of the Symbolic that

seeks to contain the unruly Semiotic of the tale it surrounds. This is particularly

apparent in its imposition of cause and effect where the main narrative does not

appear to support it – most notably in the line "And the Albatross begins to be

avenged" (120), which has affected readings ever since. This line immediately

suggests a causal relationship between the shooting of the Albatross and the

events that follow – a relationship that does not enter the text of the poem until

much later, at lines 402-5, when we hear that

> The spirit who bideth by himself
>
> In the land of mist and snow
>
> He loved the bird that loved the man
>
> Who shot him with his bow.

This section suggests that the penance the Mariner is serving is not inspired by a Christian God, but by a pagan "spirit," and hence causes a tension between the narrative itself, and its repression by the gloss, and by the conclusion in Christian morality. This tension between text and gloss is clear by comparing the ways in which they describe the water snakes – the text says that

> 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. (L272-6)

It is a description that emphasises the strangeness of the water snakes, and of the way they appear in the light – which is "elfish," suggesting pagan origin. The parallel gloss, however, reads *"By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm."* The word "calm" cannot contain the implications of the word "reared," and "God's creatures" is in direct conflict with "elfish," and thus the gloss fails, overall, to impose the Symbolic sufficiently onto the text in order to repress its strangeness.

Where I first disagree with Williams, however, is in her reading of Coleridge's intention . Williams suggests that Coleridge is indeed attempting to repress the strangeness of the poem with the symbolic – the patriarchal monotheistic symbolic at that – of the gloss. As I read this poem as a comment on the subjectivity of language, I would suggest that Coleridge's intention is in fact to draw attention to the unruly quality of the main text, and its refusal to be sufficiently repressed. My second point of disagreement with Williams, then, is clear above – the gloss is not successful as a means of repression – the nature of the ballad is not effectively contained or subdued by the gloss, and indeed it is the gloss that causes us to raise questions about the very strangeness of the text.

The gloss is not the only change to the original, 1798 text of the Mariner – its vocabulary is also amended. While the language is simplified, however – for example, "Ne" is changed to "Nor" (L254) and "dropp'd" to "dropped" (L219) – its archaic nature remains. Words such as "the twain" (L194) and "betwixt" (L176) mark the text as spoken, and as spoken in an older language than that of its readers. This draws attention to its subjectivity – it belongs to its speaker-- but perhaps it also suggests that Coleridge finds the possibility of truth in language whose characteristics are closer to the origin of language than are his own. It certainly functions, though, as the gloss does – to remind the reader of the distance between the speaker and the listener, and to foreground the nature of conscious language as inadequate to represent subjective experience even as that language is marked by its owner and by his subjectivity. The Mariner is forced to

repeat his tale, because it is never an accurate representation of his experience, whether that is a memory or a delusion. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, then, expresses Coleridge's understanding of the inadequacies of language by its internal conflicts and its disruptions. While Williams suggest the gloss as Kristevan Symbolic represses the potential of the Semiotic in the text, I suggest that the conflict between these two, and the ruptures produced by the juxtaposition, are the Semiotic that disturbs and inflects the text – it is that which renders it almost impossible to pin down to a symbolic, schematic representation.

Finally, then, I will turn to two poems that touch somewhat more tangentially on Coleridge's concern with the unconscious. Just as a thematic reading of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner shows that it is concerned with the birth into the Symbolic, so "Christabel" deals with that same repression of the elements of the unconscious. That Geraldine's 'mark' is a "sight to dream of, not to tell" (L247) immediately renders this poem's concern to be repression – it dwells on the process by which some elements of the self can be 'told' and some only 'dreamed of.' Similarly, "The Pains of Sleep," published with "Kubla Khan," and concerning Coleridge's nightmares, also dwells on the aspects of the unconscious that he finds most troubling, and helps to illuminate his anxiety about the revelations that may unwittingly accompany the language of the unconscious.

I discussed above how Coleridge's use of archaic language, and of a traditional, oral form, suggests that Coleridge is attempting to find more authentic

expression with the use of older language. The poetic form of "Christabel" takes this even further, as Coleridge sets it squarely within the traditions of the medieval Romance: while the appropriation of this genre is a feature of the gothic style, and not unusual within eighteenth-century Romantic literature, it remains a way of taking the narrative closer to ideas of origin, and this form in particular suggests shared archetypes in its established patterns of behaviour and morality. The metre diverges noticeably from his other poetry, and Coleridge states in his preface that

> the metre of Christabel is not, properly speaking, irregular,though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. (215)

His contention that this is a new form of metre is not, strictly speaking, accurate, as metre based on accent is a feature of both Old and Middle English poetry. Indeed, Coleridge's line structure also sometimes echoes the Anglo Saxon convention of splitting a line into two alliterative half lines (Mitchell & Robinson, 162), as he does in the line "She stole along, she nothing spoke" (L31). The metre of "Christabel," then, anchors it to an earlier language and a tradition far closer to origin than the ballad form of the Mariner. Indeed the Mariner's location within the ballad tradition is clear because it consistently conforms to that form: the tension that I have described arises from the juxtaposition of text and gloss.

"Christabel"'s tension arises in part from its experimentation, as Coleridge plays with the Romance form even as he uses the accented metre of Old English: he juxtaposes forms and conventions to support the unsettling nature of the narrative itself.

Thematically, "Christabel" is a poem of doubling, and dwells on the liminal space between potentiality and actuality – it is concerned with the moment just before a decision is made, when good and evil remain moral possibilities. I have already discussed Coleridge's anxiety with his understanding of the unconscious as both the part of man known only to God - and therefore closest to divine perfection - and as the repository of repressed desire, of sexuality and the urge to sin. "Christabel" defines that anxiety, and characterises it as a conflict; it suggests Coleridge's concern that these two aspects of the unconscious are in such tension that one must ultimately vanquish the other.

The first stanza immediately presents a conflict between the binary opposites of night and day - "the owls have awaken'd the crowing cock" (L2) suggests an uncomfortable image of antithetical symbols in coexistence. The stanza makes clear that the two types of bird are not only awake together, but are both vocalising, and thus producing sounds that are symbolic of specific, oppositional, moments: dead of night - "Tu-whit! -- Tu-whoo!" (L3), and break of day - "And hark, again! the crowing cock,/How drowsily it crew" (L4). This suggests a conflict between the characteristics we may attribute to night and day, but it may also suggest a time that is not quite either: "'Tis the middle of the

night" (L1) is qualified by the succeeding "by the castle clock" (L1). Hence the time dictated within the civilised space of the castle may perhaps only predominate within that space. Within the castle walls, the mastiff's response to the clock fixes the time within this space with "Sixteen short howls" - a quantifiable expression that contrasts with the sounds of the birds. Thus even the time at which the narrative is set is constructed as potentially unstable.

The third stanza opens with a question and answer construction that works to undermine assumptions of binary pairs: the lines "Is the night chilly and dark? / The night is chilly, but not dark" (L14-15) is followed shortly by the description of the cloud that "covers but not hides the sky." In each case, one possibility is fulfilled and one negated, thus creating a sense of absence, of negative space. This is strengthened by contrasts between expectation and reality – the moon is full, but "yet she looks both small and dull" (L19): even though the actuality of the scene is described, it is set against a background of the possibilities that did not come to be. Hence the imaginative setting of the poem seems to balance on the fence between the possible and the actual.

It is in this landscape that Christabel is placed – "a furlong" from the solid confines of the castle, purportedly in the wood because of dreams she had the previous night. That Christabel has chosen to wait until the following midnight to act on the anxieties raised by her dream suggests the possibility that this venture may in fact also be a dream – the liminal nature of the space and time in which she is set is dreamlike in itself. Her encounter with Geraldine creates another

image of doubling – two young women on opposite sides of an oak tree . Further

to this, Geraldine's initial identification of herself with the line "My sire is of a

noble line" (L77) aligns her with Christabel: both are noble women defined by

their relation to the patriarch. So they are both, apparently, maiden daughters of

noble men, who find themselves by an oak tree in a cold forest at midnight.

While many readers of this poem ultimately contend that Geraldine is Christabel's

nemesis in that the two women come to represent the attempt of evil to overcome

good on an abstract, higher level[33], I suggest that this section places the women as

potential alternatives of the same consciousness – just as the poem has presented

us with linked possibilities, of which only one can come into being, so this pair of

women represent apparently oppositional characteristics of the unconscious mind

struggling over repression or survival. Patricia Adair believes that Geraldine

"represents, to some extent, the evil that comes in sleep when the will is

powerless" (150): I have already discussed Coleridge's conception of the

unconscious, and of its expression in dreams, and would suggest that Christabel

also represents a part of the consciousness that "comes in sleep." She is the part

of the unconscious that is associated with prelapsarian innocence, and as such her

purity is constantly reiterated. Christabel and Geraldine represent different

aspects of consciousness that may be either lost or repressed, in order to form the

unconscious.

To move to a more specifically Kristevan reading, we are aware that

33 Tomlinson, for example sees this as a "struggle of evil and innocence" (Jones & Tydeman,
236), while Paglia seems to relish Christabel's seduction as a triumph of the pagan over the
Christian (342)

Christabel is betrothed – she is on the verge of the heteronormative passage into adulthood within patriarchal society, and this could be seen to be representative of the birth into the Lacanian Symbolic. Indeed, Christabel is consistently associated with her Mother and the maternal relationship – even her prayer is not to the Father or the Son, but rather "Mary, mother, save me now!" (L67). Hence her marriage is allegorical of the passage from the maternal Imaginary into the patriarchal Symbolic – the "nom du père." Geraldine represents a different aspect of the potentially repressed – she is characterised as seductive, even vampiric. Her meeting with Christabel at this point is illuminated by the description of Christabel's dreams of her betrothed – that they are dreams "that made her moan and leap" raises alternate possibilities that they were either fear filled or sexual. This places Christabel at a pivotal point in her development, and her vulnerability is, again, in the potentiality of her position.

The idea of marriage is alluded to when Christabel and Geraldine reach the castle. Geraldine's desire for Christabel to help her into the castle is a reference to the folk tradition that a vampire cannot enter a property unless invited, but it leads to the image of Christabel carrying Geraldine over the threshold, in the manner of a bridegroom. This returns us to the idea of liminality, of potential spaces[34] - the threshold in itself is in neither one place nor another, and similarly the bride that is traditionally carried over the threshold is no longer maid, but is not yet wife, until the marriage has been consummated. Far from

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34 I am thinking here of Professor Michael Bristol's assertion that "Thresholds are dangerous – as are brides" from his Lecture entitled "Borders, membranes, abjection", McGill University, 17 Jan 2006

overcoming this liminality, Christabel's assumption of the role of bridegroom facilitates Geraldine's introduction of potential sexuality into the maternal space which Christabel inhabits. Geraldine's expulsion of the spirit of Christabel's mother is generally read as symptomatic of her evil nature, and her desire to override the maternal guardian spirit in order to corrupt Christabel. If we continue to read the poem as allegorical of the development of consciousness, however, Geraldine's act is in fact a necessary one – for consciousness to be formed, the maternal associations and unity of the Imaginary must be left behind as one moves into the patriarchal space of the Symbolic. The more obvious expulsion of the mother as a prerequisite for sexual awakening is also here, of course, but Geraldine's role is more specifically the introduction of potential unnameable sin: her terrible mark is "a sight to dream of, not to tell" (L247), and hence repression begins, as her curse quite literally prevents Christabel from speaking of the evil she has seen.

It is this curse that marks Part II of the poem, as Christabel and Geraldine vie for their passage into the patriarchal Symbolic of consciousness, literally represented here by the patriarch, Sir Leoline. Christabel's metaphoric repression into the unconscious is represented first by her inability to speak of her experience – her expression reverts to the unstructured and animalistic – she "drew in her breath with a hissing sound" (L447) even as she represents the loss of the divine part of the self to the realm of the unconscious. Geraldine triumphantly avoids repression – she retains her voice, and her position within the

Symbolic, despite having effected Christabel's repression into it. Her acceptance

into the masculine world in fact is effected by Christabel's expulsion from it, and

hence the choice is made – the potential of the binaries is fulfilled. As an

allegory of consciousness, "Christabel" clearly does not fit any psychoanalytic

model, despite its elements of the Lacanian system. The conflict between

Christabel and Geraldine reflects Coleridge's own anxieties and frustrations

regarding the construction of the self. The curse of Christabel, her loss of

language, and her rejection by her father display Coleridge's idea of the divine

self that is lost to consciousness by our very construction as human and worldly.

Geraldine's success, however, her ability to dissemble her way into the affections

of the patriarch, show the poet's anxiety over his failure to fully repress these

aspects of his unconscious, which appear against his will in his dreams.

The final section of "Christabel" is entitled "The Conclusion to Part the

Second," and yet it appears at first to be disconnected from the rest of the poem.

Its rhyme scheme – of couplets – seems to render it more stable than the earlier

section, and its setting in the present certainly disconnects it from the earlier part.

The connection it does have, however, is that it relates an element of the

relationship between father and child. The "little child" (L644) of this section is

Hartley, Coleridge's eldest son, and his description of him as a "limber elf /

Singing, dancing to itself" (L644-5) places this section more firmly in reality than

the symbolism of the main parts of "Christabel." It also continues to concern

itself with language, and the eruption of repressed feeling into expression. The

poet describes how he "must needs express his love's excess / With words of unmeant bitterness"; in a letter to Southey[35], he explains this as a "very metaphysical account of Fathers calling their children rogues, rascals, & little varlets." The section closes with his hypothesis of why such negative language emerges to express affection:

> And what, if in a world of sin
>
> (O sorrow and shame should this be true!)
>
> Such giddiness of heart and brain
>
> Comes seldom save from rage and pain
>
> So talks as it's most used to do (L661-5)

This returns us to his anxiety of the impossibility of fully repressing sin, and the language associated with it. This explanation moves close to describing the Kristevan Semiotic, in that it suggests emotional, unruly language that disrupts Symbolic expression, and emerges without the conscious will of the speaker. It is therefore entirely connected to the rest of the poem: even as it differs in tone and language, it expresses the same anxiety over the irrepressible, and the dominance of sinful language over virtuous.

Coleridge's anxiety over the prevalence of evil in the language of the unconscious is evident in the final poem I will discuss. "The Pains of Sleep" is an overt description of Coleridge's nightmares, and of the "anguish and... agony" (L15) that attend them. He reiterates his belief in the divine as he says that "... in me, round me, every where/Eternal Strength and Wisdom are (L13) and as the

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35 As quoted by Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano (179)

divine is "in" him, his hope is that his dreams will express this part of his

unconscious. Instead, the poet's dreams are populated by "shapes and thoughts

that tortured me" (L17). His understanding of this drama of the unconscious is

deeply affected by his own morality, represented by his image of the dreams as

> Desire with loathing strangely mixed
>
> On wild or hateful objects fixed.
>
> Fantastic passions! mad'ning brawl
>
> And shame and terror over all (L23-6)

The commingling of desire and loathing returns us to Chapter 2, and my

discussion of how for Coleridge, the language of the dream is the language of

desire, and the dream plays out the very process of repression even as it expresses

that desire. Hence his dreams become a conflict between the repressed desires

that his conscious self considers immoral or sinful, and the very conscience that

represses them. In an earlier draft of the poem, line 23 read "Rage, sensual

Passion, mad'ning Brawl,"[36]and the difference between these two versions

suggests that even in his poetry, Coleridge preferred to be vague about the nature

of these shameful aspects of his dreams – yet still he suffers "Life-stifling fear,

soul-stifling shame" (L32).

    The language of this poem, however, is far more personal than those

others I have discussed – Coleridge consistently uses "I" and "me" - beginning

the poem with "Ere on my bed my limbs I lay" (L1), and ending with the

confessional "To be beloved is all I need, And whom I love, I love indeed" (L51-

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36 This is quoted by Halmi, Magnuson and Modiano from a letter to Southey in September 1803.

2). In fact, the whole tone of the poem is confessional, and highly subjective –

the constant use of the pronouns "I' and "me" do not attempt to separate the

narrator from the poet, and the pain of his suffering for sin he does not feel he is

guilty of - "But wherefore, wherefore fall on me?" - is only emphasised by the

repetition. The emotion of this poem is not displaced at all, and its theme supports

the reading of "Christabel" above – it expresses the poet's own despair at what is

expressed by his unconscious, and his inability to understand why sin, if not acted

on, still remains within the depths of the unconscious.

The pairing of "Kubla Khan" with "The Pains of Sleep," then, exposes

Coleridge's painfully divided feelings on the nature of dream language, or the

language of the unconscious. "The Pains of Sleep" displays the shame and horror

that derive from his understanding of his own unconscious – his moral and

theological beliefs cannot allow him to accept the contained and repressed

elements of violence or dissolute sexuality just because they are successfully

contained and repressed. Hence his dreams continually play out the conflict

within his psyche. While "Christabel" also plays out this anxiety over the

dominance of sin, however, it reflects Coleridge's second, important

understanding about the unconscious: that it is also home to the entirely

uncorrupted part of the self that is the inheritor of Eden. Psychoanalytic theory

would suggest that the former, so-called 'sinful,' element is repressed only by the

strictures of modern civilization, and that the latter belief in a divine part of the

self is a remnant – a dim memory - of the feeling of unity within the pre-linguistic

Imaginary (what Freud termed the "oceanic feeling"). The eruption of Kristeva's

Semiotic language would, for Coleridge, endanger the morality of the Symbolic,

and result at the very least in the "unmeant bitterness" of the closing section of

"Christabel."

Despite his anxieties over the repression of desires he considered 'sinful,'

Coleridge's main concern with the unconscious is with its language. The Rime of

the Ancient Mariner uses archaic language and conflicting modes of language to

expose the possibilities for strangeness that arise from its rifts. In fact, while

Coleridge believes the language of the unconscious inaccessible, this poem

displays aspects of Kristevan Semiotic, which,as I have discussed, comes close to

Coleridge's conception of unconscious language. It is by using Kristeva's

construction of the Semiotic as a tool to examine the language of the poem that it

is possible to detect the very language Coleridge thought impossible. Similarly,

"Kubla Khan" is concerned entirely with the desire for the perfect language, and

the understanding of its impossibility, and the lament for it comes at the end of

one of the most beautiful pieces of writing of its period, and perhaps in the

English language. The unabashed sensuality of Coleridge's language in "Kubla

Khan," and the overt sexual imagery, are intrinsic to its unity, as if he is allowing

his entire unconscious to engage in his poetic composition: allied with its imagery

and metre, it thus begins to approach the language he believes he cannot use.

Coleridge's belief in a language of the unconscious derives partly from his

theological understanding, but it is partly his understanding of theology, and of

morality, that renders his unconscious a place of danger for him. In the metrical

heartbeat of "Kubla Khan," however, it is clear that Coleridge's poetry was closer

in its expression to the language of the unconscious than he believed it could be.

SUMMARY

This thesis originally arose from my reading of "Kubla Khan," in which it seemed to me that Coleridge was lamenting a language that he could not access – a perfect language that would allow poetry to recreate, rather than simply to depict, the visions that rose up from the poet's unconscious to invade his dreams.

I began the thesis, then, with an examination of Coleridge's understanding of language. This demonstrated how his theories of language, theology and philosophy are inseparable, and that his ideas about language arise from both his understanding of consciousness, and from his belief in the relationship between God and man. This shows the importance of his belief in Adamic language, and supports the idea that he theorised a language that is not arbitrary, in which signifier and signified are ineluctably linked. It further clarifies Coleridge's conception of consciousness, and his characterisation of the unconscious as the part of man accessible only to God.

The examination of Coleridge's writing on his dreams elaborated his understanding of consciousness, and brought to light his discomfort with the fact that parts of his psyche he considered sinful remained in his unconscious, and became apparent in his dreams. At the same time, it is also clear from his Notebooks that he theorised a dream language – an unstructured and amorphous system that nonetheless constituted a signifying system. This, then, is the perfect signifying system of his conscious supposition – his language of the unconscious.

Chapter Two began with a discussion of post-structuralist psychoanalytic

theory, specifically that of Jacques Lacan, to compare Coleridge's supposition of an unconscious language to later theories that examined language and consciousness. The discussion of Kristeva's theory of language concentrated on her conception of Symbolic and Semiotic language, and shows how her description of the Semiotic is comparable to Coleridge's language of the unconscious. It also highlights the main difference between the theories – that while Coleridge believes the language of the unconscious to be buried and inaccessible, Kristeva believes that it inevitably erupts into conscious language, and is therefore unavoidable.

The final section of the thesis comprised a reading of some of Coleridge's poetry in the light of the preceding discussions. It becomes clear from this reading that these poems are characterised by Coleridge's belief in a language of the unconscious. His anxieties over the nature of repressed desire in the unconscious is metaphorically and directly expressed in "Christabel" and "The Pains of Sleep," while his understanding of the process of differentiation, of the birth into subjectivity, is related in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and "Christabel." In all his supernatural poems, however, he attempts to come closer to the language of the unconscious, even as "Kubla Khan" overtly laments its inaccessibility. By using Kristevan theory to elucidate unconscious expression, this chapter shows that Coleridge's language does in fact move into the realm of the Semiotic. Ultimately, then, the thesis shows that while Coleridge theorised a language of the unconscious, and lamented its inaccessibility, his poetry is

marked by this very language.

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